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Fate strange Fake

フェイト / ストレンジ フェイク

Faldeus

A male magus who challenged the Magic Association and declared the start of the False Holy Grail War. He observes the progress of the False Holy Grail War from the shadows.

Kurukoa Tsubaki

A young girl who remains continuously asleep in a Snowfield hospital. She possesses enhanced Magic Circuits and received Command Spells even while unconscious. She continues to wander alone within a dream space created through magical energy.

???

A mysterious gothic lolita girl who appeared before police chief Orlando. She seems to be knowledgeable about the system of the Holy Grail War, but her true identity is—

Orlando Reeve

Both the police chief of Snowfield and a magus participating in the False Holy Grail War while spreading a surveillance network throughout the city. He plans to accomplish the astounding feat of defeating Heroic Spirits by human hands.

Caster

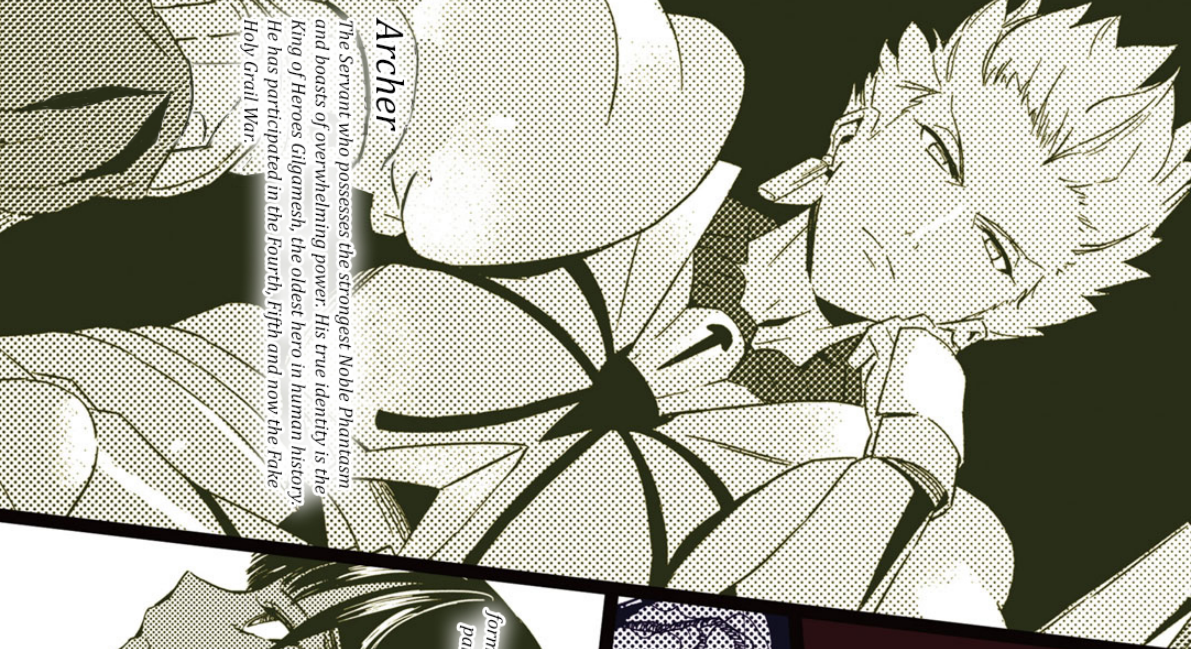
The Servant summoned by police chief Orlando. He is a woman-loving hedonist with zero fighting capability, but he possesses the skill to "create new Noble Phantasms that surpass the originals".

Rider

A mysterious cluster resembling black mist that appeared within Tsubaki's dream space. He acknowledges Tsubaki as his Master and wields his power in the real world in order to realize the reality that Tsubaki wishes for.

Lancer

The Servant summoned by the voice of an experimental magical creature as it was fleeing. He has an elegant appearance that can't be distinguished between male or female, but his true identity is Enkidu, a mud puppet created by the gods and the sworn friend of Gilgamesh.



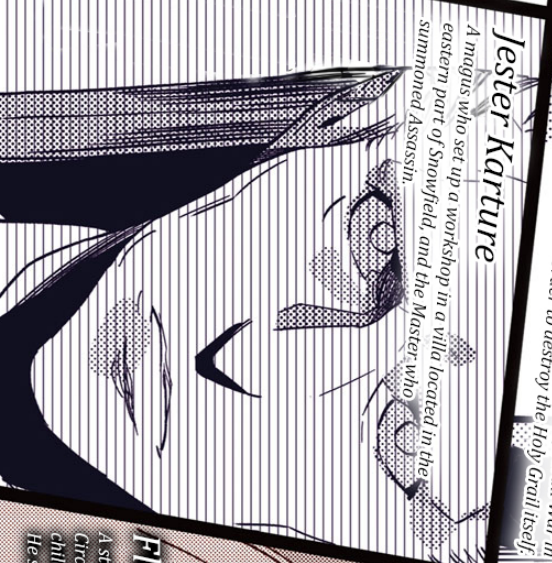
Archer

The Servant who possesses the strongest Noble Phantasm and boasts of overwhelming power. His true identity is the King of Heroes Gilgamesh, the oldest hero in human history. He has participated in the Fourth, Fifth and now the Fake Holy Grail War.



Tine Chel

The daughter of a tribe native to Snowfield. She forms a contract with the golden Servant Gilgamesh and participates in the Holy Grail War in order to get rid of the magi upon her tribe's land.



Jester Karture

A magus who set up a workshop in a villa located in the eastern part of Snowfield, and the Master who summoned Assassin.



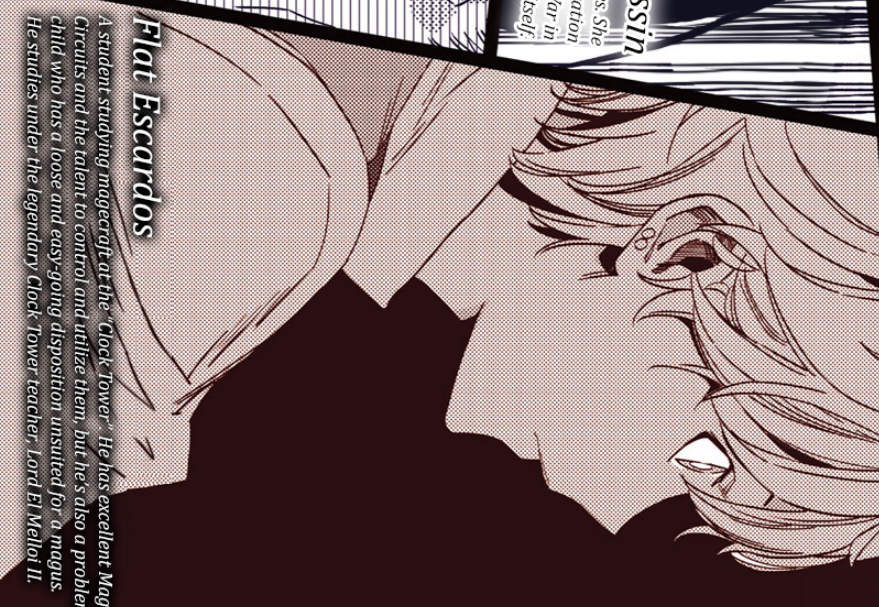
Assassin

The zealot Servant who has mastery of 18 miracles. She was feared as a "heresy" even within the religious organization of her assassination group. She fights in the Holy Grail War in order to destroy the Holy Grail itself.



Berserker

The Servant summoned using an imitation knife as a magical catalyst and formed a contract with Flat. He possesses the ability to freely change his form, a power that originates from a certain popular British legend.



Flat Escardos

A student studying magecraft at the "Clock Tower". He has excellent Magic Circuits and the talent to control and utilize them, but he's also a problem child who has a loose and easy-going disposition unsuited for a magus. He studies under the legendary Clock Tower teacher, Lord El Melloi II.

Fate/Strange Fake

Volume 1

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フェイト / ストレンジ フェイク

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Original Work/ TYPE-MOON

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CONTENTS

Extra	“Betrayal”	001
Prologue I	“Archer”	013
Prologue II	“Berserker”	028
Prologue III	“Assassin”	046
Prologue IV	“Caster”	058
Prologue V	“Rider”	069
Prologue VI	“Lancer”	082
Extra	“Observer. Or, Character Creation”	097
Chapter 01	“The War Begins”	104
Prologue VII	“Visitor & ●●●●”	129

Truth, at times, crushes the world's lies,
But it cannot erase the 'truth' that 'the lies were there.'
Not even with the power of the Holy Grail.

a t e / s t r a n g e h a k

Extra

“Betrayal”

Extra

Betrayer

A cleft.

That city, rising from the darkness of the surrounding hinterland, was certainly worthy of being called a “cleft”.

It was not a disjunctive barrier, of the kind that might separate day from night; light from darkness. Rather, it was a harmonious barrier, one that demarcated a boundary between things of the same ilk. That was the strange thing about the city of Snowfield.

It was a watershed, but the things it divided were not so different as magic and sorcery, nor were they as similar as men and beasts.

In a sense, it was a hazy boundary, smudged with the colors of dawn and dusk. But it was more than just a divider. It was a black nexus, begotten from a blending of pigments.

To put it differently, it was the boundary between one town and another; the boundary between nature and man; the boundary between a man and a megalopolis. It was not at all unlike that indistinct morass that separates dreams from mere sleep.

The American West. The city lay a while to the north of Las Vegas.

Its surroundings were a product of a delicate balance. North of the city was a vast ravine, reminiscent of the Grand Canyon. To the west lay a dense forest, an unusual sight in such an arid area. To the east, a tract of lakes and marshes; to the south, a vast desert unfolded.

Though the city had not one smidgen of farmland, it was surrounded in all four directions by land perfectly suited for agriculture. Indeed, that city alone was a strange existence that stood out from its surroundings like a sore thumb.

A boomtown with its sights set on the future; a city with just the right mixture of the natural and the artificial, that was how some might describe Snowfield, dazzled by its beauty. But in reality, the city was built on arrogantly arrogant notions. Sometimes, those notions were apparent; but sometimes, they were not.

The lie of the surrounding land was as natural as it could be. It was as if that town, that cleft, that nexus, that blending of countless colors had deemed itself fit to bring concordance unto its milieu. The town became as a black stage, evaluating all that surrounded it.

According to records pertaining to the very beginning of the 20th century, the area was home at the time to a few indigenous peoples here and there, and essentially nobody else.

Starting about 70 years ago, though, the area began to rapidly develop. By the time the 21st century rolled by, the land had undergone a total transformation. Now, it was home to a thriving

city of 800,000 people.

“Of course, rapid development can happen anywhere. The fact that we have been asked to investigate such a seemingly-typical city indicates that we ought to devote special attention to the city’s origins.” Thus grumbled an elderly man, clad in blue-black robes.

The night sky was dark, and there was not a star in the sky. It seemed like the clouds could burst open at any time.

From a sparse grove of trees at the edge of the vast forest to the west of the city, the old man peered through a pair of binoculars. As he gazed at the light thrown off by the agglomeration of skyscrapers off yonder, he went on, with disdain apparent in his voice.

“Hrm... binoculars these days really are quite handy. They come into focus with just a push of a button; and further, it’s less of a hassle to use them than to go to the trouble of sending out a familiar.... What a wretched age we live in.”

With a sour look on his face, the old man spoke to the young apprentice standing behind him. “Don’t you agree, Faldeus?” he asked.

The man called Faldeus stood beside a tree perhaps two meters away from the old man. His voice filled with doubt, he replied, “Never mind that. More importantly, need we really be so concerned about that thing? That so-called... Holy Grail War?”

— The Holy Grail War —

It was a phrase often appearing in fairy tales and legends from times past. The moment that phrase left Faldeus’s lips, his teacher lowered his binoculars and spoke at him, with exhaustion apparent in his eyes. “Faldeus, is that a joke?”

“No... I meant...,” stuttered the apprentice. He lowered his gaze, as if expecting a harsh punishment.

The old man shook his head and sighed, anger entering his voice. “I did not think I would have to ask, but... just how much do you know about the Holy Grail War?”

I did skim over the materials I was given, but...”

Then you know enough. Be it a mere rumor among children or the ramblings of a third-rate tabloid as long as there is some possibility, no matter how small, that an object described as a Holy Grail will come into being, we cannot afford to ignore it.”

“For it is the true desire of all magi, yet at the same time a mere means to the ultimate end.”

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Fate/Strange Fake 1

Once upon a time — there was a battle.

It took place in a certain country in the Far East.

The battle took place in an ordinary town, unbeknownst to its people.

However, that battle hid a truly dreadful secret. Indeed, it was a war that brought about a miracle called the Holy Grail.

The Holy Grail.

It is an eternal miracle.

It is a legend.

It is a relic of the world of the gods.

It is a terminus.

It is hope— and so, to seek it is to admit despair.

The very identity of that object referred to as the Holy Grail changes from time to time, from place to place, and from person to person. In that war, the Holy Grail was not quite the “Sacred relic” that it is often pictured to be.

There, it was said that the miracle called the Holy Grail appeared in the form of an omnipotent wish-granting device.

But it was merely said to be so, for at the time that the battle to claim the Grail began, the wish-granting device called the Holy Grail did not exist.

Before the Grail itself appeared, seven spirits were manifested.

From all of this world’s histories, traditions, magics, and fictions from every medium, “Heroes” were selected to be summoned into the present-day world as “Servants.”

They formed the fundament of the Holy Grail War, and were absolutely essential for the eventual summoning of the Holy Grail.

Those spirits, beings immeasurably stronger than humans, were called forth to destroy one another.

The magi who summoned those Heroic Spirits were known as “Masters.” In order to earn the right to obtain the Grail, a right which could devolve upon but one, they too slew one another. That carnage is precisely what is known as the Holy Grail War.

The spirits, once slain in battle, flowed into the vessel of the Holy Grail; and when that vessel was filled, the wish-granting machine was completed. That was the system underlying the Holy Grail War.

Those battlefields were perhaps the deadliest, most noxious places in the world.

The participating magi had to conceal their existence from the rest of the world, as always, and so they trod quietly through the night, letting loose the flames of battle while unseen.

As part of its mission to oversee those objects described as Holy Grails, the Church dis-

patched its own supervisor. The noxious battlefields gleamed with a sanguine veneer as they were cleansed by those overwhelmingly powerful spirits.

And, now—

The Holy Grail War: a battle fought five times on an island in the Far East.

Something appeared in an ordinary town in the States. That something was accompanied by harbingers akin to those seen in that war fought in the Far East. Rumors of that something spread among magi.

As a result, the Association, that organization which brings all magi together saw fit to conduct a secret investigation of that town. And so, it came to pass that an elderly mage and his disciple were dispatched.

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“...very well. Your knowledge of the Holy Grail War is sufficient. However, Faldeus. I am unimpressed by your lackadaisical attitude. It disappoints me that you know so much about it, yet care so little. Depending on how things turn out, this could become a matter that concerns the entire Association. Were that to happen, those wretches from the Church would surely turn up. Get it together, Faldeus.”

“But is this really the place?” replied Faldeus, skeptical despite his teacher’s admonitions. “The system underlying the Holy Grail War was built by the Einzberns and the Makiri. Is it not tied to the land that the Tohsaka proffered? Could someone really have replicated their system... a full seven decades ago?”

“If this is indeed the place... ah, yes. In the worst-case scenario, it is possible that this place was built solely for the sake of the Holy Grail War.”

“It couldn’t be!”

“Calm yourself; that was just one possibility. It is said, after all, that the three founding families did anything and everything to attain the Grail. In any case, we have yet to learn who is attempting to recreate the Holy Grail War in this town, Faldeus. It would not surprise me if the perpetrator was some relation of the Einzberns or of the Makiri. ...One of the Tohsaka is at the Clock Tower, so I doubt it is their handiwork.”

The old mage returned to his binoculars, leaving open the possibility of the founding families being involved.

It was perhaps an hour till midnight, and yet the city lights were almost as bright as ever. Snowfield stood serenely against the overcast night sky, boasting of its own existence.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

After surveying the area for a few minutes, the old mage prepared to cast a spell, as if it was the only reasonable thing to be done. The spell would render his binoculars capable of viewing the ebb and flow of ley lines.

The apprentice gazed upon his master from behind, and meekly asked, "If a Holy Grail War truly does take place, surely neither we of the Association nor the devotees of the Church would keep quiet about it...?"

"Indeed... but there have only been omens thus far. Back at the Clock Tower, Lord El-Melloi said that there were irregularities in the ley lines, but.... Well, that was just a crude hypothesis on his part, to say nothing of that student of his. Hence, we are now here in this land, in order to verify El-Melloi's predictions."

Exhausted, the old mage chuckled.

With a mixture of irritation and scorn permeating his voice, he talked and talked at great length, perhaps at his disciple, or perhaps at himself.

"Of course, no Heroic Spirit can be summoned unless preparations for a Holy Grail have already been made. If a Heroic Spirit is indeed brought forth, our doubts will immediately be cast away... but I would prefer for that not to happen."

"It's a surprise to hear that coming from you, sir."

"Speaking for myself, I very much hope that the rumors surrounding this land are nothing but. And if something does materialize here,

I would like for it to be a fake Holy Grail."

"Does that not contradict what you were saying earlier? That the Holy Grail is the true desire of all magi and a means to the ultimate end...?"

"Well... I suppose it does," he replied, furrowing his brow. "But even if, hypothetically speaking, there is something here worthy of being called a true Holy Grail, I say confound that! It would pain me to see the Grail appear in a country with such a meager history.... I am sure that many magi would do anything to reach the Root, but, to be frank, I would not. If I were to reach the Root... it would be like an ill-mannered youngling muddying up my bedchamber with his unkempt shoes. That wouldn't do for me." He shook his head exasperatedly.

"Is that so?"

For the umpteenth time that day, the old mage sighed at his apprentice. "In any case," he wondered out loud, changing the topic of the conversation, "in this new land, I have to wonder... just what manner of Servants could be summoned?"

"Indeed. Leaving Assassin aside, the identities of the other five classes depend entirely on their summoners, so we truly have no way of even predicting what might happen."

Unable to contain his aggravation with Faldeus, the mage harshly rebuked him: "If you leave

Assassin aside, there are six classes remaining, you clod! It was not two minutes ago that I spoke of the seven Servants! Enough with your tomfoolery!”

Each Heroic Spirit summoned to the Holy Grail War is placed in one of seven classes.

Saber.

Archer.

Lancer.

Rider.

Caster.

Assassin.

Berserker.

The Heroic Spirits are summoned in forms that accord with their various special characteristics, thereby honing their abilities even further. A Hero of the sword may be summoned as Saber; a Hero skilled with the spear as Lancer.

To reveal one’s true name is tantamount to broadcasting one’s weaknesses and special abilities; as such, Servants are typically referred to by their class names. Each class is also endowed with various skills, each able to influence combat in its own distinct way.

For example, Caster has the power of Bounded Field Creation, while Assassin has the ability of Presence Concealment.

In a sense, the various classes are like chess pieces, each with a distinct ability.

But each player has only one piece. The chessboard is irregular, designed for a battle royale. And every piece has the chance to control the board, provided that its mover, its Master, is strong enough.

It was this most fundamental principle of the Holy Grail War that Faldeus had bungled. His teacher lamented that he had such an unworthy disciple, but

Faldeus remained emotionless, despite having been scolded.

He hadn’t turned a deaf ear to his teacher’s words, nor did it seem that he was reflecting on his indiscretions. “No, there are six classes in total, Mister Rohngall,” he said, in a soft and steady voice. “...What?”

Suddenly, a chill ran up the spine of the old mage, Rohngall.

This was the first time Faldeus had referred to him by his name.

He wanted to yell at Faldeus; to ask him what was going through his head but Faldeus’s icy glare stopped him. Rohngall remained silent.

Faldeus’s emotionless visage twitched. “In the Holy Grail War waged in Japan, there certainly were seven classes,” he said, coolly pointing out his teacher’s mistake. “But in this city, there are only six. The Saber class, the strongest and most suited for battle, does not exist in this false Holy

Fate/Strange Fake 1

Grail War.” “What... are you talking about?” Something crunched in his backbone.

His Magic Circuits, his nerves, and his blood vessels all conveyed a warning signal, causing an alarm bell to ring in his ears.

His apprentice, or at least, the man who must have been his apprentice until a few minutes ago, took a step towards him. “The system created by the Makiri, Einzberns, and Tohsaka was truly amazing,” he said, in a voice bereft of emotion. “That’s why we couldn’t copy it perfectly. We would’ve liked to begin the war with an exact copy... but we used the Third Holy Grail War as our template, and that was a real mess of its own, you see. It really is a shame.”

Faldeus clearly looked as though he couldn’t be past his mid-twenties, and yet he was narrating events from over 70 years ago as if he had seen them himself.

Just when it seemed that his expression was going to turn sinister, the corners of his lips contorted, as if pulled at by invisible strings. Still as cool as ever, he spoke from the bottom of his heart.

“You referred to my nation as ‘young’. But that is all the more reason for you to remember, elder.”

“...What?”

“That you ought not to make light of a young nation.”

crunch crunch crik crak creak crack crik crunch

Every last one of Rohngall’s bones and muscles creaked. Perhaps it was because he was tightening his guard, or perhaps he was just outraged.

“You wretch... who... are you?”

“I’m Faldeus, of course, old chum. Of course, the only thing you really know about me is my name. Anyway, I really have learned quite a bit about the Association up ‘till now. I suppose I ought to thank you for that.”

“.....”

Based on his extensive experience as a mage, Rohngall knew right away that the man standing before him was no longer his apprentice; rather, he was an enemy.

Rohngall readied himself to kill Faldeus the instant that long-time acquaintance of his made a move. And yet, alarm bells continued to ring through his head.

He must have known precisely how capable a mage Faldeus was.

There were no signs that Faldeus had been concealing his strength. As an experienced spy for the Association, he could be sure of that.

At the same time, though, his experience as a spy made it clear to him that he was in a dan-

gerous situation.

"You must be a plant, then, from another organization, sent to infiltrate the Association. And you have been one ever since you told me you sought to become a mage."

"Another organization, eh?" With a gluey, syrupy voice, Faldeus corrected Rohngall. "The Association seems to be under the impression that a group of non-Association heterodox mages is responsible for the creation of this Holy Grail War, but.... I mean, honestly, how could... well, never mind."

As if to indicate that there was nothing more to be said, Faldeus took a step forward.

He wasn't particularly menacing, nor did he present himself as an enemy, but it was nonetheless clear that he was plotting something. Rohngall clenched his teeth and smoothly lowered his center of gravity, preparing himself to respond to whatever Faldeus might do.

"Do not underestimate me, child."

As he spoke, he readied a plan to make the first move in this duel of magi but he had already lost.

By the time they had begun trying to outwit one another as magi,

Rohngall had already been defeated by the man standing before him "I'm not underestimating you, *sir*."

—for Faldeus had not planned to fight him as a mage in the first place.

"I'll hit you with everything I've got."

Faldeus ignited the lighter that he was holding in one hand. A cigar suddenly appeared in his other hand, which was empty until then.

It looked like apportionment, but there were no signs that he had used any magical energy.

Seeing that Rohngall was puzzled by his actions, he grinned. It was a grin from the very core of his being, a smile of a sort that Rohngall had never seen. He went on, saying, "Haha, that was just an illusion—a trick. Not magic."

".....?"

"Ah, well, you see, we aren't really an organization of magi, specifically. I hope you aren't too disappointed," said Faldeus, without even the slightest bit of tension in his voice. He lit his cigar. "We answer to the United States of America. It just so happens that we have a few magi among our number; that's all."

Rohngall was silent for a few moments, and then he replied. "I see. Now, pray tell, what does that cigar have to do with everything you've got?"

Rohngall was trying to buy time to ready his magic. But the instant he spoke those words—

Something burst through the side of his head. Everything was decided in an instant.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

It was a wet- and blubbery-sounding explosion.

The bullet decelerated as it pierced his cranium. Lead scattered everywhere, swimming in a sea of brain-fluid as it burned his mind away.

Instead of exiting through the other side of his skull, the bullet ricocheted around his brainpan, putting an instantaneous and permanent end to the old man.

And then even though he was quite apparently dead, dozens more bullets pierced his body, as if to deliver a final blow.

The bullets were not all fired from one place. There must have been more than a dozen marksmen situated at various locations.

That was clearly overkill. What an inexorable way to destroy.

His aged limbs bent and crumpled powerlessly, like a marionette forced to dance to rap music.

“Thanks for the dance. That was pretty funny.”

Rohngall’s body sent up a red spray as it slumped to the ground, squelching. Faldeus looked at the fresh corpse and clapped slowly. “You look thirty years younger now, Mister Rohngall.”

A few minutes later—

Faldeus stood still before the body of his teacher, collapsed in a pool of its own blood.

But the forest around him had changed. There was a strange atmosphere around him.

Dozens of men clad in camouflage gear moved out of the forest from behind Faldeus.

Each one of them wore a black balaclava and held a silencer equipped assault rifle, each engraved with a different design; rustic, yet detailed.

Their races were scarcely discernible, never mind their emotional affects. One of them straightened up and walked up to Faldeus, delivering a salute as he spoke. “Reporting in, sir. Situation is normal. We’ve found nothing out of the ordinary.”

“Good work, buddy,” replied Faldeus. Whereas his underling spoke quite formally, Faldeus’s voice was warm.

He ambled over to the corpse of the old mage, looking down at it with a weak grin on his face.

Still facing away from his subordinates, he said, “Well, then... seeing as how many of you are probably unfamiliar with these so-called magi, let me give you the rundown.”

The uniformed men had already fallen into formation behind him. In silence, they listened to Faldeus speak.

“A mage is not a sorcerer. Don’t clutter your imaginations with fairy-tale creatures and legendary beasts. Think of... ah, that’s it—think more along the lines of a Japanese anime or a Hollywood flick. That’s all there is to them.”

He squatted down before the body of what was once his teacher, grabbed a piece of it, and lifted it into the air with his bare hands.

It was a bizarre sight, but nobody so much as raised an eyebrow.

"They die when they're killed, and physical attacks are reasonably effective against them. Now, there are some who cover themselves with a veil of mercury, strong enough to deflect thousands of bullets. There are others who can transfer their consciousness and extend their lives with the aid of insects embedded in their bodies. But... well, the former type has no defense against an anti-tank rifle, while the latter type almost certainly couldn't survive a precision missile strike."

They may well have figured that Faldeus was joking. The camouflaged men struggled to suppress their sniggering.

But the moment they heard the next thing Faldeus had to say, they all fell silent.

"There are exceptions, though.... For example, this fellow, who wasn't even here in the first place."

"...could I ask you to elaborate on that, Mr. Faldeus?" inquired one of the gunmen, ever-so-formally. Faldeus cackled and tossed a piece of the corpse's flesh at him.

He caught it staidly. He looked at the piece of meat, likely part of a finger, and gasped with surprise. "...wha?"

Under the illumination of his flashlight, it was clear that white bone protruded from the red sinews of the flesh.

But there was something wrong. Something unlike the flesh of a true human.

Transparent threads, not entirely unlike fiber optic cables, extended out of the flesh and wormily wiggled about in a most disturbing fashion.

"A cyborg, so to speak? Well, we call it a puppet. Mister Rohngall is a terribly cautious investigator, you see. He's not so foolish as to come all the way out here with his real body. At the moment, he's probably situated either in one of the branch chapters of the Association, or in his own atelier. I'll bet he's all in a tizzy now!"

"A puppet...? That's preposterous!"

"It is something of a spectacular technique, but do notice that he wasn't able to make it seem perfectly human. The form of an old man works well for concealing those imperfections, I suppose. I hear there's a puppetress whose dolls are utterly indistinguishable from the bodies they're modeled on... they'd even pass a DNA test." Faldeus talked and talked, sounding disinterested, as if he were an uninvolved third party.

The soldier frowned. "In that case, would he not have heard everything you said earlier?" he

Fate/Strange Fake 1

asked of Faldeus, his commanding officer.

“He would have. Just as planned.”

“Er...?”

“I went to the trouble of gloating like a fool prior to killing him precisely in order to ensure that the Association would come to know of everything that I said.” Faldeus stood atop the fake body, lying in a pool of fake blood, and gazed up into the dark sky as it began to drizzle. Contentedly, he murmured, “Consider this a declaration... our warning to the magi.”

And that marked the beginning—

The beginning of the banquet of men and Heroic Spirits; the beginning of the false Holy Grail War.

Prologue I

“Archer”

Prologue I: Archer

He was truly a mage, in every respect—

Yet at the same time, he had stagnated, in every respect.

The false Holy Grail War.

He knew that it was an imitation of the ritual once carried out on an island in the Far East. That did not bother him.

It matters not.

Perhaps it is a sham or a counterfeit; even if it is, though, that does not matter. As long as it yields the same results as the original, it will suffice.

No proud mage would rely on the fruits of another's labor. Such a mage would choose instead to construct a system of her own, just as the three founding families created the Holy Grail War. He, however, was quick to follow in the footsteps of others. To lead or to follow—both options were reasonable, in a sense.

From the very beginning of this mere imitation of the Holy Grail War, there were none as determined in every respect as he; none as enthusiastic than he.

From the very beginning, he was prepared for anything that might happen when he came to Snowfield.

When he first heard the rumors, he laughed them off as mere gossip. Then, a report issued by Rohngall sent tremors through the Association. News spread from mage to mage until it reached him.

He was from a family of not-insignificant repute among magi, but his lineage's power was on the decline. As the head of his family, he was under pressure.

He had formulated his fair share of magical theories in his time. He was an intelligent man. He knew quite a few techniques. All he lacked was raw power, the sort that should have been built up over many generations. This drove him to ever-greater frustration.

The standard thing to do in this situation would be to spend many years researching ways to increase his family's power, and then to pass that knowledge, along with his Magic Crest, on to a sufficiently-able descendant.

But he was in a hurry.

His son was even less capable of magic than he was.

There were many families whose magical natures grew weaker and weaker over time, until they completely lost touch with the world of magic.

This is no laughing matter.

I will not allow myself to fall like the Makiri.

Like any other organization or corporation, the Association was rife with obstacles.

Only a mage of a powerful bloodline could come to possess a method for producing powerful, thriving successors.

It was a catch-22. He was a mage, in every respect, and yet, it wasn't enough.

He bet everything on the perhaps-fake Holy Grail War, came to Snowfield, and put all of his chips on the table.

All of his assets, his whole past, and even his future.

I have nothing to fear. Everything will go smoothly.

So as to demonstrate his resolve, he extirpated his son. His son, who had no future.

He did the same to his wife, who tried to stop him.

He felt nothing for her, a woman who could not bear him thriving offspring.

Even so, he found it shocking that she understood nothing of what it meant to have self-respect as a mage.

It must have been her fault that his son was lacking.

Alas, she was the best woman he could obtain with his current rank.

In order to move up in the world, he had to win this war.

Even if this Holy Grail were a counterfeit, the mere act of winning a so-called Holy Grail War would suffice to improve his standing as a mage. He could even find a path to the Root by winning this war.

Or perhaps he could learn the secrets of the Makiri and the Einzberns.

No matter what, he was bound to be in a better position by the end of this war.

What a splendid gamble that was.

At the very least, he would reap a reward more valuable than all the things he risked in entering the war.

He thought about all the various ways he could benefit from this war—but not once did he consider the possibility of his defeat, and the ensuing end of his lineage.

There was a good reason that he didn't consider the possibility.

He had a solid chance to win.

Or at least, he had a good enough chance to justify having done away with his son.

So... these are the Command Spells, I take it?

They were a little bit different from what he had expected.

Even so, he gazed at his right hand, a loving smile stuck to his face as if he were gazing upon his own newborn child.

The seals took the form of a loop of chain, and served as proof that he had been selected as

Fate/Strange Fake 1

a Master in this Holy Grail War.

But if these have appeared....

Then the Grail has recognized me! Me! As a Master!

As the one who shall control that Heroic Spirit! As he spoke, the man glanced at the cloth parcel beside him— and then, he laughed.

He laughed. He laughed. He laughed.

A grand ravine, north of Snowfield.

In the mountain chain near the ruddy cliff face, there was a system of caves.

Though the caves were originally formed by natural processes, they now served as the mage's atelier. He had established a Bounded Field to prevent others from approaching.

A lamp lit the space around the mage. He picked up the parcel and carefully and respectfully removed an object from it.

It—was a key.

It would not, however, be appropriate to describe it as a mere key.

It was exceedingly ornate, and about the length and weight of a small survival knife.

It seemed to him that the jewels that ornamented it were extremely valuable, both magically and monetarily.

I have heard tell that it was summoned in a previous Holy Grail War using a fossilized snake....

And using this relic, there is no doubt that I shall summon it.

Once upon a time—when his family was still powerful—one of his ancestors wagered everything, much like he had just done, to obtain that key.

What his ancestor sought was the treasury of the golden city, which was said to house all things that exist in the world. That key was the device that would open the gates deep within the city of legend.

He had no interest in material wealth. A treasury enshrining every possible magical artifact, however, was something he could not overlook.

When all was said and done, that ancestor managed to verify that the key was genuine, but made no further progress. He never found the treasury itself. The key was impregnated with some magical energy of unknown origin, but that did not matter to the mage at this point.

It was a relic belonging to the Heroic Spirit he desired. The key would serve as a superlative catalyst, all but ensuring that he would attain the Servant he sought. The time has come.

Let us begin.

The mage stood up—and his smile vanished abruptly. He set aside his emotions and his selfish desires, focusing all his attention on the ceremony he was to conduct.

He unified all his senses, focusing them to a point, and sealing off those which were unnecessary.

His nerves, his blood vessels, and the invisible Magic Circuits that ran throughout his body. He felt a hot liquid racing through those pathways and—

The mage spoke a summoning invocation, both a felicitation of his self and a malediction against the universe.

A few minutes later.

He lost his life and everything he had sacrificed for this war.

The lineage of magi to which he belonged had met its end.

It all happened in a split-second. A mere split-second.

Following a battle of a mere few seconds, he met his end, just like that.

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“I did it.... Ha ha, ha ha ha ha ha! I did it!”

When the mage saw it appear before him, he could not remain silent.

There was no need for him to ascertain the being’s true name.

From the very beginning, he knew what he would summon.

He just barely managed to suppress a roar of joyous laughter. For a few seconds, he just stood there, ignoring the Heroic Spirit.

The Heroic Spirit’s countenance was tinged with clear and obvious displeasure. Nonetheless, he carried out his duty as a Heroic Spirit. Of course, there’s no telling whether or not he conceived of it as a “duty” in the first place.

“...Answer me. Are you the insolent mage that dares make an entreaty to a king in all his radiance?”

He had golden hair and golden armor.

As a Servant, he was defined by his unparalleled magnificence. His query to the mage was laced with contempt.

The mage was dismayed when he heard the Servant’s question. Even though he could sense the sheer overwhelming power of the being before him, he felt a twinge of anger.

How dare a mere Servant be so impertinent!

His pride as a mage won over his trepidation. However, an ache in the Command Spells on his right hand brought him back from the brink of rage.

...So be it. Given this Hero’s personality, I should expect as much.

Right at the outset, he would have to make their relationship clear.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

In this war, he would be in charge. The Heroic Spirit he had summoned as a Servant was merely a tool of his.

Yes. It is so. I am your master.

He prepared to complete his response to the Servant's query, extending his right hand forward to display his Command Spells— whereupon he realized that his right hand had gone missing.

"...Huh? What?"

He was at a loss for words. His stammers echoed throughout the cavern.

Though not a drop of blood had fallen from his body, his right hand was clearly gone.

Panicking, he lifted his wrist up to his face. The sharp odor of burnt flesh filled his nasal cavity.

Faint wisps of smoke were rising from the stump of his wrist. Clearly, his hand had been cut off with some sort of flame.

The moment he became consciously aware of that, a surge of pain shot through his nervous system and— "HiAAgAA-giAAAIigaAAAAAaAAAAAaA!AAaaaAAAAAaaaaaaa!" A scream—a scream—an overpowering scream.

He shrieked at the top of his lungs, sounding like some kind of enormous insect. Noticing this, the Heroic Spirit, sounding bored, said, "So, you are a jester, knave? If that be so, amuse me with more elegant screams. This will not suffice."

The Servant didn't even lift an eyebrow, prideful as always. It would seem that he was not responsible for the disappearance of the mage's right hand.

"HiaAAA, AAaa, hiiAAAAaAAAAa!"

In the face of this incomprehensible happening, the mage was about to lose control of himself—but as a mage, he could not allow that to happen. He forced himself to calm down, and quickly composed himself.

There is someone... within the Bounded Field!

How could I allow this to occur? How injudicious of me!

Under normal circumstances, he could have sensed any intruder the moment they entered these caves, since he had made them into his atelier. However, he had let his guard down while he was focused on summoning his Servant. The intruder could have snuck in unnoticed while the caves brimmed with the Heroic Spirit's magical energy.

Even so, there were other traps setup to support the Bounded Field. None of the traps had been activated. If the intruder had managed to deactivate every trap that stood in their way, the mage would have to be quite cautious in dealing with them. That much was clear to him.

As he magically reconstituted what remained of his right hand, he faced towards the pres-

ence he now sensed—towards the tunnel that led out of the cave—and bellowed, “Who are you?! How did you get past my Bounded Field?!”

And then—a response came right away, sounding forth from the darkness of the cave.

However, the response was not to the mage, but rather to the golden Servant: “O mighty king, Your humble servant begs permission to present herself before You.”

The Servant thought for a second and then replied, haughtily,

“Very well. I shall grant you leave to witness my glory.”

“...I am most grateful for this privilege, Your Majesty.” Her voice was clear—immaculate, even. It was devoid of emotion, as if it rejected all that was.

She emerged from the shadow of a boulder—and though her voice alone left the impression that she was young, she was even younger than her voice suggested—perhaps twelve years old. Her skin was dark brown, and her hair was a lustrous black.

Clad in the elegant beauty of her ceremonial garment, decorous in every way, she was as a child of noble upbringing. Though her face was pulchritudinous, accentuated further by her dress, the expression she bore was somewhat less resplendent.

She humbly took a step into the atelier and bowed deeply before the altar atop which the Heroic Spirit stood. Then, unconcerned about the dirt on the ground, she fell to her knees.

“What....” The mage choked back a cry of rage. Unable even to discern how strong the girl was, he could not afford to act rashly. Meanwhile, the girl paid the mage no heed.

The Heroic Spirit was unsurprised by the girl’s deferential posture. He looked down at her and spoke, with great power underlying each word. “You have done well not to spill the blood of a mongrel in my presence. However, the air is now filled with a most indelectable stench of flesh. If you wish to render unto me an explanation for this indiscretion, do so now.”

The girl briefly glanced at the mage.

“I beg Your forgiveness, Your Majesty. I thought it fitting to render retribution unto that thief for having stolen the key to Your treasury, as he was unworthy of facing justice at Your hands,” she replied, still kneeling.

As she spoke, she brought forth a piece of human flesh.

It had, for sure, been part of the mage’s body, and it was magically connected to the Heroic Spirit by virtue of the Command Spells inscribed upon on it. It was, in other words, the mage’s right hand.

The golden Heroic Spirit nodded at the girl’s response. He looked down and saw the key, placed on a pedestal by his feet. He picked it up—and then tossed it away, disinterestedly.

“This key is a trifle. There lives not a single man in the entirety of my garden who would dare lay a hand upon my treasures. Though I did order that this key be created, I did not need it, and

Fate/Strange Fake 1

so I did away with it.”

“...?!”

The mage had been speaking an incantation to numb the pain in his right wrist. When he heard the Heroic Spirit’s statement, he was shocked.

One of his ancestors had staked everything on the hopes of attaining the key to that treasury.

That artifact, his family’s one and only pride, had been tossed away like a piece of filth. And that too, by his Servant, a being who should have been his slave; his tool.

Overcome with rage, the pain in his right arm grew dull, even as he stopped chanting the incantation.

However—as if to deliver a fatal wound to the mage, the brown skinned girl turned to look at him, and spoke at him in an intimidating voice. “If His Majesty wishes that it be so, I shall do no further battle with you. I ask that you depart now.” Her voice dripped with pathos.

“Wha...”

“If you do so, I will not have to slay you.”

“—— ————.” The mage lost control of himself.

The fury that had welled up within him took control of his Magic Circuits. He did not even have the capacity to speak. Hysterically, he released all the magical energy stored in his left hand.

He put all of his magic, his madness, his might into a sphere of black light, and flung it at the girl with all his strength. It soared towards her, tearing through space, ready to consume her whole—it blitzed; it surged; it raced.

The girl should have been destroyed by his burst of magical energy before she could take another breath.

But that didn’t happen.

“()”

A silent chant.

As her lips moved, magic began to take form around her.

Almost immediately, immense magical energy erupted between her and the mage.

It was like a spell that had been compressed so far that it became soundless—a chant of overwhelming power.

And at the very end—the mage saw it.

An enormous firey maw, perhaps twice as tall as him, appeared in front of her and drank down the magical energy he had released, and then—

— That cannot be.

That was the last thing he ever thought.

In the end, what was it that could not be? He did not even have time to contemplate that.

— Th-that can't... ca-cannot... that... c-can't be.

As a mage, he would have liked to think that even if he were to die, his lineage would live on... but then, he recalled that it was a mere few days prior that he had slain his would-be successor with his own hands.

— It can't be! It cannot! I... I will... die? Here? That c-cannot....

— That cannot cannot cann — — — — —

— — — — —.

And then, the mage vanished.

He lost his life and everything he had sacrificed for this war.

The lineage of magi to which he belonged had met its end.

It all happened in a split-second. A mere split-second.

Following a battle of a mere few seconds, he was swallowed up by those flames. He met his end, just like that

“I beg Your forgiveness for having subjected You to such an unseemly sight, Your Majesty.”

She had just killed a man, but she was not flustered. She bowed her head before the Heroic Spirit.

The golden Servant looked upon her so as to say that it did not matter to him. Then, in reference to the magic the girl had used, he said, “I see. So your people have ruled this land in my absence.” The magic she had just used did not originate within her self.

Rather, it was likely that she had exploited the ley lines of the land.

In acknowledgment of that fact, emotion flitted across the girl's face for the first time. Her head still bowed low, she wistfully replied, “We have not ruled it. Rather, we have lived in harmony with it. ...Just as Your Majesty surmised, my people are but mere commoners once outside Snowfield.”

“A mongrel shall never be anything but a mongrel. Those with magic are no different than those without.”

His arrogance suggested that he believed all things save for himself to be alike. The girl did not reply.

The Command Spells that had been on the mage's right hand had already migrated to her own right hand.

Magical energy now flowed into the Heroic Spirit's being not from the mage, but from the girl. As he observed this, he spoke as imposingly as ever—somehow bored, but at the same time infinitely majestic. “Very well. Once again, answer me. Are you the insolent mage that dares

Fate/Strange Fake 1

make an entreaty to a king in all his radiance?” The golden Heroic Spirit.

The greatest of all Heroes. The man said to be the king of all kings—

The girl gave a firm nod, and bowed down before him once again.

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“...I do not seek the Holy Grail,” said the girl quietly, as they made their way out of the cave.

She had identified herself to be Tiné Chelc. As the Master of the golden Servant, she was now a participant in the Holy Grail War.

And yet, she had made the contradictory declaration that she did not desire the Holy Grail. Elaborating on her true goals, she said, “We wish to drive out the magi who selected this place as the site of their Holy Grail War, who have run roughshod over this land. Such is the extent of our desire, Your Majesty.”

She declared her desire to destroy the Holy Grail War without the least hint of gravitas. The golden Heroic Spirit—the king summoned into this age as a Servant of the Archer class—disinterestedly replied, “I do not care for the Grail either. If it is the true Grail, I shall punish the knaves who stole my treasure; and if it is a false Grail, I shall execute the ingrates who performed this ritual.”

“Your gracious words reassure me, Your Majesty,” she thanked him. Continuing on, she spoke of her people: “For a thousand years, my tribe has lived in harmony with the land on which Snowfield was built. We even protected it against the tyrants from the east who sought to rule this place. But then, a sect in their government joined forces with those wretched magi... and in a mere seventy years, they overran this land.” Her voice was thick with a mixture of rage and sadness.

But the Heroic Spirit did not seem to care. “What rot. It matters not which mongrel reigns supreme over this mongrel land, for it is a part of my garden, and shall in the end return to me. Ordinarily, I would not deign to interpose in a squabble among mongrels... but if they dare lay their hands on my treasures, that would be a different matter.”

As always, he thought only about himself. And what did the girl make of that?

She did not find it terribly unpleasant, nor was it particularly surprising.

He conducted himself as a king at all times, and so none could question his kingship.

His indomitability inspired a twinge of something like envy in her.

She composed herself and stepped out of the cave.

Outside the cave, perhaps a hundred people in black garments stood at attention, awaiting her return.

The majority of them were brown-skinned, just like her, but there were also a few white- and black-skinned people among them.

They had driven a fleet of vehicles to the lip of the valley and encircled the entrance to the cave. Clearly, they were not there to do an honest day's work.

They laid eyes upon the girl and the imposing man beside her and—
In unison, they reverently knelt before the girl and the Heroic Spirit.

"Who are these knaves?"

Tiné, too, knelt before him before replying. "...They are but the members of the society that seeks to revive our tribe and defeat the magi that have descended upon the city, Your Majesty. I have succeeded my father as the society's representative. And so, I must fight in this war."

"Oh?"

Many people knelt before him in veneration. Perhaps it reminded him of how things had been when he was alive. His eyes faintly narrowed as he ever-so-slightly acknowledged her.

"Mongrels though you may be, you seem to understand who is worthy of your worship."

"We would not dare to meet Your Majesty's splendor with anything but the deepest gratitude."

"So, you wish to make use of my might for your ends. It seems that you have prepared adequately for the forthcoming battle."

"....."

She knew she was supposed to be honored by that comment, and yet she was uneasy.

The king was very clearly bored, and took no pains to hide it.

And right away, as if to confirm her suspicions, the Heroic Spirit spoke: "But this grail is, after all, a false one. The other rabble who have been drawn here are mere trifles. Deliver judgment unto them as I may, I shall find no respite from this tedium in doing so."

By the time he had finished speaking, he had brought forth a small bottle.

Everyone who was there to witness it would fondly reminisce about it later. And what was it? It was "a distortion of space, from which emerged a single carafe that fell right into the Heroic Spirit's hand."

It was a beautifully-ornamented vessel made of who-knows-what. Perhaps china or perhaps crystal—either way, it was lustrous and translucent. Some sort of liquid washed about within it.

"If this war will be a mere trifle to me, it is only fitting that I treat it accordingly: as a childish game. There will be no need for me to use the full force of my abilities. Until an enemy worthy of my power comes forth, I shall spend my time in leisure."

As he trailed off, he unsealed the vessel and was about to down it at a single go, when—

Fate/Strange Fake 1

Right then.

With timing so perfect that it must have been brought about by the machinations of fate, rather than chance—

The earth cried out.

【————°°———. ————°———. ————°———. ————°———.】

“!?”

Tiné and her followers all turned to look at the sky.

They had heard a mighty roar off in the distance—one with the power to shake both heaven and earth.

But it was too beautiful to be called a “roar”. It was as though a giant angel or its ilk, or perhaps even the Earth itself, was singing a lullaby.

They could tell that the sound had come from far, far away—from the forests that lay to the west of Snowfield.

That tremendous rumbling noise, which laid waste to the very laws of physics, was, for some reason, something Tiné had faith in.

It was like the first cry of a newborn, and at the same time—

It was almost certainly the voice of a stupendously powerful Servant.

Archer, too, stood motionless upon hearing that voice.

The bottle he had conjured was at his lips. He had been about to drink, when he stopped—and it was then that the golden king displayed a powerful emotion for the first time.

Even those who had known Archer for some time would say that it was rare to see him so emotional. That king among all kings was quick to anger, and by no means level-headed—but to think that even he could be brought to this state.

“That voice... could it be?”

His eyes lit up with surprise, consternation, bewilderment—and then, exhilaration.

“...Is it you?”

Tiné noticed that the Heroic Spirit’s powerful aura wavered for a mere instant as he whispered those words.

But, without a moment’s hesitation, Archer exuded arrogance once again, overbearing as always. He burst into a fit of earnest laughter. The sound of his jubilant voice penetrated the vast sky, higher and ever higher.

And then, after he had had his fill of laughter—

“Ha! What fortune! What am I to call a happenstance of this sort if not proof of my kingship?!”

Prologue I: Archer

He swelled with delight and vigor, as though he had not been bored just a few moments earlier.

“Rejoice, mongrel girl! It seems that I shall have occasion to use the full force of my abilities in this war!”

The king of heroes was uncharacteristically talkative, perhaps because he was awash in joy.

“What a pleasure it would be to end it all in a duel on yonder plaza.... But then again, if he has been summoned as a mad warrior, or if.... No; I shall not speak of it. This is not a matter that the mongrels ought to hear of.”

He was in a pleasant mood, unable to stifle his laughter, as kingly as ever. As he stared in the direction from which the roar came, he spoke to Tiné, who still knelt beside him.

“Look upon me, Tiné.”

Shocked that the Heroic Spirit would refer to her by name, Tiné raised her head to look up at him.

The king tossed her the bottle he had been holding.

“It is an elixir of youth. I imagine you have no need for it at your age, but now that it has come to this, I do not need it, either. Be grateful.”

“Y-yes...? Yes, Your Majesty!” Her eyes were wide with surprise.

Archer glanced at her for a moment before going on. “If you wish to become my subject, I shall command you thus,” he said, majestically. Though he paid little attention to her, Archer was in high spirits as he delivered his kingly order. “You are but a mere child. Act as one. Until you learn the ways of the world, it will suffice for you to gaze upon my kingly might with jubilation.”



Prologue I: Archer

Though there was a touch of sarcasm in his words, they were nonetheless powerful.

She had discarded all her emotions for the sake of her tribe, and yet, when faced with his words, she faltered.

Indeed, because she had discarded her emotions, she could do nothing but display her utmost respect to him. She was unable to jubilate, and so hung her head.

“I shall attempt to do so, Your Majesty,” she said, apologetically.

And so—with that, one Servant and his Master had stepped onto the battlefield.

Gilgamesh, the King of Heroes, along with the girl whose land had been stolen.

Prologue II

“Berserker”

Prologue II: Berserker

England — somewhere in London

The Clock Tower.

For most, that term refers to a popular tourist destination in London.

For magi, however, it means something else altogether.

It is the headquarters of the Association, which brings countless many magi together, and at the same time, is the finest educational institution for the training of young magi.

It could well be said to be the Vatican of magic. For as long as England has existed, it has produced first-class mage after first-class mage, each of whom has gone on to elevate the art of magic to a new level.

“Fuck...”

A word unbecoming of that austere institution resounded through the halls.

“You know what you are? In a word, you’re an imbecile,” said a man in his early thirties, demonstrating the youngster facing him. His long hair fluttered in the breeze as he swore.

He wore a red coat with golden ornamentations on its shoulders, and his face bore a tremendously sour expression.

But that youngster desperately replied—

“Oh, come on! At least describe me with three words!”

—with a response that was just a bit off.

“You’re a cretin and an imbecile. There are no other words to describe you.”

The youngster stood his ground, unintimidated by the stern man.

“But I really, really want to participate, professor! I’ve got to go to the States for the Holy Grail War!”

“For fuck’s sake! Don’t bloody go around yelling about that in the hallways! You incorrigible imbecile! Damn it all... where did you hear of it? It’s not a top-secret matter, but it certainly isn’t something a rotten little whippersnapper ought to know about!” The professor gave the clingy youngster a piece of his mind, having checked to make sure that there was nobody in the vicinity.

He was an instructor at the Association, the finest educational institution in the magical world, and was known to all as Lord El-Melloi II. Apparently, that wasn’t his real name, but everyone who knew him referred to him as Lord El-Melloi II out of respect.

Though he was still young, he was said to be the finest lecturer in the Clock Tower. Every student who had taken a course taught by him had gone on to become a first-rate mage. His students became famous among magi the world around for their exploits.

As such, he earned the respect of many magi, who bestowed upon him various nicknames,

Fate/Strange Fake 1

such as “Professor Charisma”, “Master V”, and “Great Big Ben 9 London Star”.

He had no great exploits to his own name, however, and did seem a bit irritated that his students were stealing the spotlight.

But for now, what was irritating him was specifically the young man standing before him, who was also one of his students.

In response to his professor’s question about the Holy Grail War, the youngster nonchalantly replied, “Yesterday, some professors and administrators from the Association were holding a council meeting in one of the basement lecture halls, right? You know that famous puppet master, Mr. Rohngall? That was the first time I actually saw him in the flesh!”

Upon hearing his student’s reply, El-Melloi’s expression turned indistinct, perhaps with infuriation. He applied a claw hold to his student’s face and hissed, “Why—the—fuck—do you know what happened in that meeting?”

“I was a bit curious, so I eavesdropped!”

“That was a top-secret meeting, you twit! They must’ve set up dozens of Bounded Fields!”

He averted his eyes. “Er, well, see, I know I shouldn’t have, but I was really, reaaally curious...” he replied, apologetically.

“So I figured, why not try hacking into the room’s own Bounded Field? And what do you know, it worked!”

—silence.

The use of the word “hacking” among magi was not a peculiarity of his: its use was in fact rather prevalent among younger magi. His actual actions likely had nothing to do with hacking or cracking; presumably, he meant that he had bypassed the Bounded Field unnoticed, snuck into the meeting, and eavesdropped.

Flatt Escardos.

He was the most senior of Lord El-Melloi II’s students.

Though he entered El-Melloi’s tutelage as a young man, he subsequently spent many years in the Clock Tower, unable to graduate.

To describe him in a single word, only El-Melloi’s terms of abuse would really be appropriate.

Using a few more words, however, it would be fair to describe him as a man with boundless magical potential and talent. A man who, however, critically lacks the ability to put that talent to any good use.

He was the eldest son of the Escardos line, a family that lived on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was hoped that Flatt would be a mage who had Magic Circuits the likes of which are rarely seen, along with the talent necessary to control them, but—

Alas, his magical talent was for naught, since he lacked the stern disposition that is necessary

for all magi.

At first, he was hailed as a prodigy and studied under a number of other professors. Eventually, though, all of them started bellyaching about Flatt, and so in the end, he was assigned to Lord El-Melloi II, for there was nobody else available.

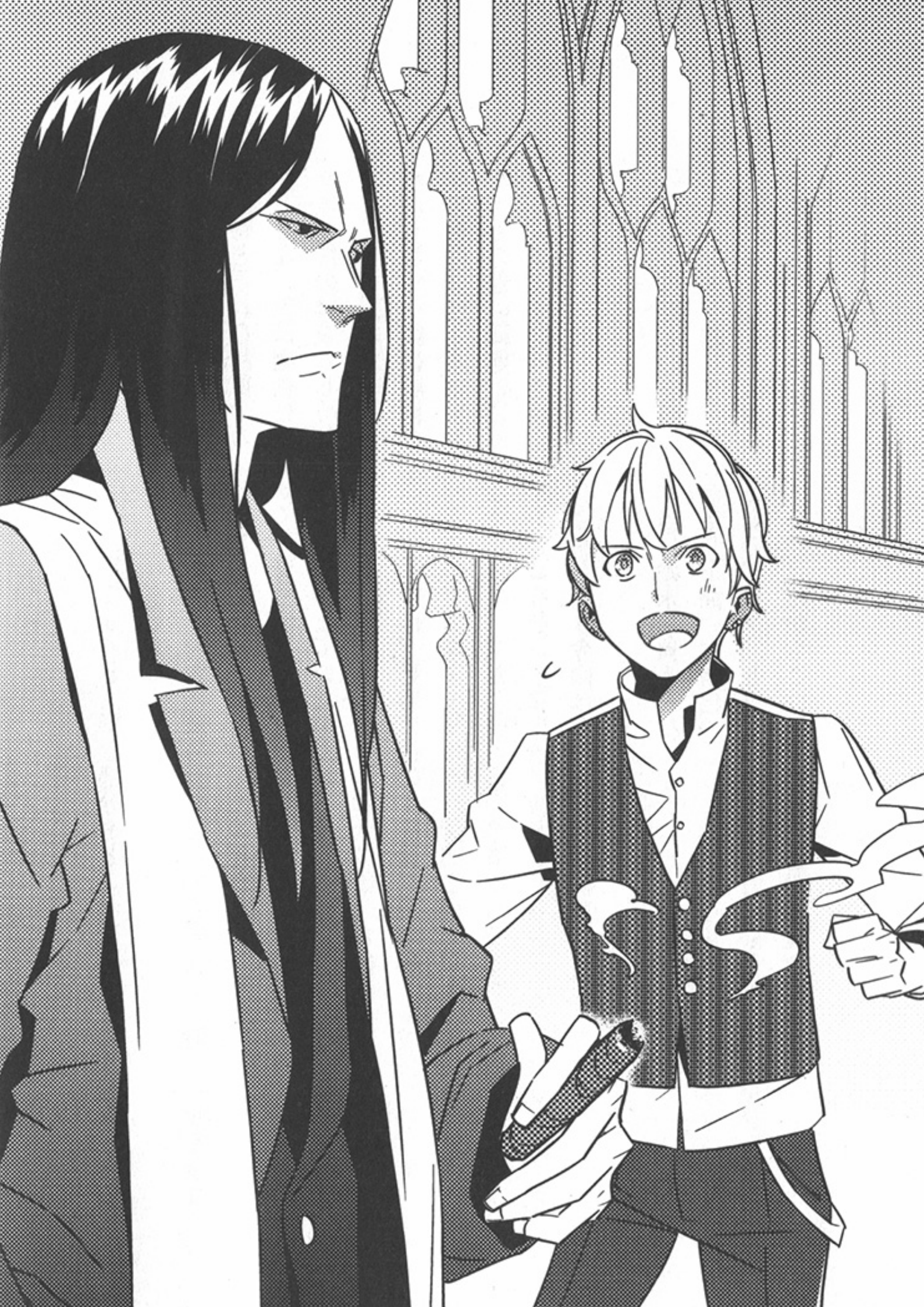
Years passed. As Flatt's magical talents developed, he came to surpass all the other students. Other professors were unable to achieve the same results with their students. This was a good sign for Master V's reputation.

That said, Flatt had too many other problems, and so was still yet to graduate from the Clock Tower.

Usually, Lord El-Melloi II would refuse to overlook a student's weak points, unwilling to send an underprepared mage out into the world. But this time and only this time, he had begun to regret having made that choice.

"A talented idiot is the most dangerous kind of idiot..." said Master V, calmly.

Master V had moved past anger. He had achieved a sort of ascetic enlightenment. That said, he looked as sullen as usual. He whacked his student and said, "I'll pretend I never heard any of this. Now quit harassing me about this."



"I won't be a bother, professor! I just, you know, I need some kind of item to summon a hero, right?! I don't know how I'm supposed to find one of those! Like, if I had a portrait of Napoleon, could I summon Napoleon?! An emperor would be the coolest thing!"

"If I were the Heroic Spirit Napoleon, I'd rather have you face the firing squad than make a contract with you!"

El-Melloi thought about making a break for it, but he decided against it. Instead, perhaps because something about the Holy Grail War had come to mind, he asked Flatt a serious question. "...Flatt, you know, you're.... why do you want the Holy Grail? I can't imagine that you take magic so seriously that you'd want to reach the Root. Knowing you, I have to ask—you aren't planning on wishing to graduate, or wishing to peeve me off as comeuppance for not letting you graduate, or anything that stupid, right?"

El-Melloi was completely unprepared for Flatt's response.

"Because I want to see it!"

"...what?"

"I mean, it'd be so super-cool! It's the Holy Grail! Hitler and Gobbles wanted it for the Third Reich! And Shi Huangdi and Nobunaga and Godzilla all looked for it too! If it really exists, I've just gotta see what it looks like!"

"His name was Goebbels, not Gobbles. Godzilla never looked for it. I don't know about Nobunaga or Shi Huangdi, but historically and culturally speaking, that just doesn't seem right." El-Melloi corrected Flatt on the points that didn't matter, but stayed otherwise silent.

Flatt waited a while for his professor to respond, expecting to be thoroughly scolded. Eventually, El-Melloi sighed, and calmly and kindly said, "Do you understand what a war of mage against mage really entails? You might well experience things worse than death, and end up being killed gruesomely, not having accomplished anything."

"And people who know that still look for the Grail, right? Now I want to see it even more!"

El-Melloi was about to yell at him, telling him to think about it more—

—but even if he did think about it more, this moron would probably end up saying the same thing.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he decided to question Flatt from a different angle.

"Well, tell me this: do you have what it takes to kill somebody for the Grail?"

"Uh.... What if I could win without killing people... like, we could play chess, or..."

"Brilliant! If your opponent happens to be the World Chess Champion, that just might work! Hell, maybe you could even have a chess boxing match!"

"...This is a tricky problem, huh. I really, really want to see the other Heroes... and if it works out, I want to make friends with them! If I made friends with six Heroes, I'd be an awesome

Fate/Strange Fake 1

mage! We could even conquer the world!”

El-Melloi remained silent. He had figured that Flatt had completely lost track of his initial question somewhere along the way.

He wasn’t planning to admonish Flatt, nor was he particularly surprised by Flatt’s ramblings.

He put his hand to his chin, and seemed to be thinking about something for a while—

And eventually, he snapped back to reality, and said, “...that’s not happening.” He flatly put a stop to Flatt’s fantasies.

“Yeah, yeah, well, I’m counting on you, professor! Or, should I say,

Great Big Ben 9 London Star!”

“Don’t call me that to my face! And honestly, why did you have to pick that nickname!? You’re making fun of me, aren’t you? You are making fun of me, you clod!”

“Well, don’t worry! I’ll think up a new nickname for you. It’ll be perfect! Like, um, how about ‘Magical Miniskirt Professor’ !?”

“Fuck off and die!”

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In the end, Flatt clearly looked miserable after having been dealt with so coldly by El-Melloi. He wandered around the academic wing of the Clock Tower. He walked down a long corridor, humphing in a manner unbefitting a man nearly 20 years of age.

And then—

“Ah, good to see you there.” A woman called out to him from down the hallway.

She was one of the administrative personnel of the Clock Tower. In her hands, she held a large box and a small bundle.

“These packages are for your professor. Could you pass them onto him?”

And so, she thrust the two packages into Flatt’s hands. Now, he would have to hand these over to Master V, but— Aw, man, I bet he’s still mad.

Flatt thought negative thoughts as he headed back up the hallway, whereupon he was overcome by curiosity about the contents of the box. He used clairvoyance magic to examine its contents.

He saw a small knife with a sinister-looking design on it, probably designed for ceremonial use.

And then, with his keen powers of clairvoyance, he saw a name inscribed on the blade. An electric sensation shot through his body.

Could it be...!

Professor...! You got it for me!?

Taken in by his own misinterpretation, he set off at a run, carrying the box with him.

There were a number of symbols on the inside of the box, but they weren't written in any script he could read. Presumably, they were magical instructions from some other country or somesuch.

He could figure out how to interpret those instructions at some other time. For now, he had one goal: to get to the center of the academic wing, as quickly as possible.

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"Son of a fuck... he's back again?" Lord El-Melloi II was clearly not pleased when he saw a certain someone sprinting down the hallway towards him. Strangely, though, when Flatt caught up to him, with a small package in his hand, he started babbling about things that had nothing to do with the Holy Grail War.

"Pr... Professor... you... g... got... this... this thing... for... me!" gasped Flatt, as he showed the parcel to his professor. Having run a hundred meters at a breakneck pace, Flatt had run out of breath quite quickly.

El-Melloi looked at the parcel, unsure at first what it actually was. When he saw the address and logo printed on the exterior, he realized what it was and nodded. "So, you... what, do you want this?"

Flatt nodded his head furiously, like he was some kind of head banger.

"Well, alright. If you want it, you can have it. I didn't need it anyway."

Hearing his professor's response, Flatt glowed with happiness—the greatest joy of his life thus far.

"Thank you so much! I mean, really, thank you so very much! I'm so glad I'm your student, prof!" He dashed off, almost tearful with joy.

"Damn. When I was his age, I was everything he isn't. I bet he used clairvoyance to look inside it.... What was in there that he wanted so much?" El-Melloi muttered under his breath, exasperated.

A few minutes later—

El-Melloi II had returned to his room. As he thought about his incompetent pupil, a cabinet caught his eye.

It was a double lock, with both a physical component and a magical one. El-Melloi carefully undid the locks and picked up the object inside the cabinet.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

It was a peculiar-looking protective case, in which rested a piece of cloth.

From the looks of it, it was an antique. It was decaying, and had no apparent use.

However, given that it was the most carefully-secured object in the room, it was evident that it was no mere raggedy scrap of fabric.

“Take the other Servants as your subjects and conquer the world, huh....” Thinking back on Flatt’s ramblings, he frowned and scowled.

“If I couldn’t stop him, I was considering letting him have this... but I’m glad it didn’t come to that.”

Still frowning, El-Melloi II sighed in relief and put the lid back on the case. He thought about the parcel he had let Flatt have.

“I suppose I’m in no position to talk, but they really should rethink that system of having students courier other people’s mail. Not that it was a particularly important piece of mail.”

“Well, anyway, if that’ll get him to forget about the Holy Grail War, that’s a good thing.”

A few months earlier—

El-Melloi had been enjoying some Japanese video games in the privacy of his room. Every time he finished playing a game, he filled out the survey card that had been included in the game box and jotted down his impressions of the game. It was just the proper thing to do.

Of course, he had to pay international postage to have the cards airmailed back to Japan, but he did so nonetheless. Thanks to that, he had been entered into a number of sweepstakes, and so his room was filled with all sorts of game merchandise.

That’s not to say that he filled out the surveys just to get merchandise. To the contrary, he had little interest in most of the products he received. He really did just want to relay his opinions back to the game designers.

And then, a few months after that—

If there was any merchandise El-Melloi really did want, he would just order it directly. When he saw the sender’s name—that of a Japanese company—on the package Flatt had brought to him, he figured that it was just another piece of bonus merchandise. And so, he didn’t even bother to open it before letting Flatt have it.

Just as El-Melloi suspected, it was nothing more than a piece of game merchandise.

Judging from the company’s name, he figured it was an action figure from some sort of game about robots or something of that ilk, but—

In actuality, it was from a simulation game called “Night Wars of the British Empire”.

And as for what that piece of merchandise was—

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A few days later — the City of Snowfield — Center Park

The sun shone brightly, hanging high in the midday sky.

Flatt had hopped on a plane to America post-haste. Of course, he was thoroughly unprepared for the journey.

He had a vague idea of how the Holy Grail War worked, but he was clueless about the specifics.

Ah, Flatt—a man who had more important things to worry about than the Holy Grail War—

And a man who gazed at the sigils on his right hand with glee.

“These are... so... awesome! If I use these... Command Spell thingums... will they disappear?”

He rubbed his hand over and over again. Every so often, he would mumble something—and then, his shoulders would droop. It was as though he was heartbroken.

“It’s like they’re gonna vanish. I’ve got it! I absolutely won’t use my Command Spells, no matter what!”

Apparently, Flatt had somehow figured out that Command Spells disappear after being used. If anybody else with knowledge of the Holy Grail War had been in the park at that time, they surely would have apprehended Flatt then and there and taken him in for interrogation.

Luckily for him, the only people in the park were ordinary people— mostly children with their parents.

Flatt stared at his Command Spells for a while longer. Eventually, he opened the cloth parcel he had been holding.

From it, he removed a knife.

It was a dastardly-looking knife, tinged in red and black, and was, all in all, rather crass.

Even though it was still sheathed, its blade was none the less bizarrely lustrous—elegantly so, even.

“Man oh man, thank goodness for Master V. I mean, sure, he was beating around the bush, but he had this awesome relic all ready and waiting for me!”

Flatt still hadn’t realized that a mix-up had happened. Looking at the knife with his own eyes did not dissuade him. Rather, it left him more confident than ever in the verity of the knife, and it spurred him onwards, bringing him all the way to the States.

And then—imagine!—the Holy Grail had selected him to participate in the war, and had endowed him with Command Spells for that purpose.

He stared alternately at his Command Spells and his knife—and every so often, he mumbled something.

Perhaps thirty minutes had passed, when—

Fate/Strange Fake 1

A shocking scene unfolded in the park—and had any other Masters known about it, they surely would have fainted from the shock of it.

To be frank, it was miraculous. If his teacher, El-Melloi II, had been there to witness it, he would likely have praised Flatt. Of course, he would have been furious while doing so. And he would have kned Flatt in the unmentionables a few times first.

Was it a miracle? Or was it a mere stroke of luck—or perhaps, something achieved by Flatt's own latent talents? Either way, in a certain sense, Flatt had delivered a powerful slight against the false Holy Grail War.

Of course, the only one who was aware of this was Flatt himself.

"I ask of thee: art thou the Master who hath summoned me?"

"I... wha!?"

Upon hearing that frighteningly crisp voice, Flatt leapt out of his seat and looked around for the speaker.

As before, though, all he could see were families and couples walking about. Whoever it was that had spoken was nowhere to be seen.

"Aye, say ye? I shall take that as an affirmative. Our contract is complete. As partners in search of the Holy Grail, let us be jolly chums."

"Huh? Huuuh!?"

Flatt furiously gyrated his neck in all directions, but still could not find anybody who seemed like the one who had just been speaking.

Perhaps witnessing the young man in a panic, the voice continued on.

"By the stars... you have summoned me before the eyes of the public, and without an altar at that! Quite some pluck you have there, O Master of mine.... Hold it right there.... If you did not use an altar, did you neither speak the summoning incantation!?"

"Uh, um... sorry, there was a lot of magical energy flying around, and I was kind of fiddling with it... and I guess we linked up. Man, I'm really sorry about summoning you this way."

"I see... Well, that is quite alright—in fact, it speaks volumes about your excellence as a mage."

Apparently, the voice of that Servant-ish being was being transmitted straight into Flatt's head.

He soon realized that magical energy was flowing through his Command Spells and going... somewhere. Rather shyly, he started talking to the voice in his head. "Er, erm... I guess this isn't really the, um, the right time to ask, but... are Servants always like this?"

"Not at all, lad. I am a special case. Don't let it bother you." The Servant's voice was friendlier than Flatt had imagined, and it was quite refined and polite, to boot. Oddly enough, he was unable to get any idea as to what, specifically, the Servant's identity might be.

“In any case, I do not really have a definite “identity”, so to speak. You could say that my appearance and manner are of all varieties—but then again, perhaps you could not. It is that sort of thing.”

Upon hearing any ordinary voice, one can typically tell if the speaker is a man or a woman; or if the speaker is old or young; or maybe even what the speaker’s occupation is. Something about the voice is bound to give away those details. But this voice, which was transmitted directly into Flatt’s head, was devoid of any special characteristics. It was like he was speaking to a headless monster. “So, um... could you tell me what your name is?” A casual question.

If the knife in his hand was what it seemed to be, the Servant would surely be just what he expected.

And yet, Flatt was unable to reconcile his impression of a “Heroic Spirit (?)” with the voice inside his head.

This made sense, since he knew that his image of a “Heroic Spirit (?)” did not precisely accord with the class of beings called “Heroes”.

But, well—in any country where British films and novels were popular, there couldn’t be many who hadn’t heard of that Servant. Granted, in terms of notoriety, he wasn’t quite on par with Sherlock Holmes or Arsène Lupin, but—unlike those two, he had really existed, once upon a time.

For some reason, the Servant remained silent. Flatt nervously looked around, but—

Suddenly, a man of large build, dressed in shades of black, entered his field of view.

“Boy oh boy! You finally manifested!”

“I what? What intarnation’re you talkin’ about, boy?” The man in black looked at Flatt suspiciously.

Flatt yelped, and his face turned a ghastly shade of white.

Of course the man would be wearing black.

He was a policeman, with a handgun holstered at his hip. He peered down at Flatt—a man sitting on a bench in front of a fountain in the middle of the day with a knife in his hand.

“What in blazes are you doin’ yammerin’ to yourself, son? And what’s that there knife for? You’re acting mighty suspicious.”

“N-no! I mean! This isn’t!”

Flatt was rattled. He tried to explain what he was doing, when—

“Did that surprise you?”

Suddenly, the police officer began to act in a kind manner. He handed his truncheon to Flatt. It felt like a real truncheon—but the moment he grasped it, it vanished into thin air.

Surprised, he looked up from his hand, only to find a conspicuous lack of a police officer. In

Fate/Strange Fake 1

the officer's stead, he saw a woman dressed in a positively lascivious dress.

And then, the woman spoke to him. "I thought I might demonstrate my specialty to you before introducing myself." The voice, though certainly feminine, had the same feel to it as the voice that had been in his head just a little while prior.

"Huh? Huh? What!?" Flatt grew more and more surprised.

Then, the woman disappeared from before his very eyes and—

"I apologize for startling you, Master. I thought this way might be faster."

The voice was in his head again.

Some of the nearby families seemed to have noticed that something was off. Some rubbed at their eyes while others cocked their heads, and a few children even asked their parents why the police officer turned into a woman and then vanished. Of course, their questions were met with laughter.

Given what they had seen, and given that the imprint left in the ground by the woman's high heels remained, they could be certain that what they had just seen was no hallucination.

The truth was not for the ordinary people who looked on with suspicion—only within Flatt's mind would it be revealed. "Allow me to introduce myself once again. My true name is—" Flatt waited for him to continue, with bated breath.

He knew what his Servant's true form was. However, in the legend in which he appeared, the Servant's true name was far more important.

Flatt waited and waited for the voice to continue echoing in his head, but—

When the Servant finally did continue, what he said surprised Flatt in an altogether different way.

"To be frank, I do not know."

"Are you serious!?"

Flatt had risen halfway off the bench he was sitting on. Realizing that there was nobody in front of him, and that he looked rather silly, he embarrassedly sat down while furtively glancing about.

Paying no attention to the young man's antics, the Servant continued to speak, with a voice devoid as ever of any peculiar characteristics.

"None ought to know my true name, save perhaps for myself—the true me, not the me of legend. ...Or, perhaps, the one who put a stop to my murders."

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Prologue II: Berserker

The knife Flatt held was not a true relic, but rather, an imitation.
But where that Heroic Spirit was concerned—
It could draw forth a much more powerful spirit, precisely because it, like the Heroic Spirit,
was an imitation designed for public consumption.
That Servant had no name, though there was proof that he once lived in this world.
And yet, none knew what he truly looked like.
None knew his appearance; his true name; whether he was a man or a woman;
Or whether he was even a human at all.
He—though his gender was not known—was a symbol of fear; one who terrified the world.
The people imagined him in countless ways, and he was the topic of myriad tales and theories.
Perhaps a doctor;
Perhaps a teacher;
Perhaps an aristocrat;
Perhaps a prostitute;
Perhaps a butcher;
Perhaps a devil;
Perhaps a faerie;
Perhaps a conspiracy; Perhaps madness.
It was not even certain whether he was a single person or not. The people's fear of him was
exploited to create all manner of stories about him—and then they were unified into a single
legend.
But he was not merely a legend. He had really existed.
Indeed, for Flatt, who had spent many years at the Clock Tower, his legend was probably the
one closest to home.
Everyone knew what proof there was that he existed.
In the district of London known as Whitechapel—
There were found the macabre corpses of five prostitutes. There could be no greater proof.

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“That said, there is a name by which I am known, and by which I identified myself in my
letters.”

“Jack the Ripper.”

A few months earlier—

El-Melloi II had played the game “Night Wars of the British Empire”.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

He had mail-ordered the game from Japan, thinking that it would be a wargame about the various legendary knights of England.

Alas, the Japanese do not distinguish between the homophones “knight” and “night” in writing, and in this case, they had meant the latter. The game’s protagonist was based on a real person, who wandered the streets of London at night while fighting against the maddened personality within him. At times, he would also end up fighting demons. It was one of those adventure games.

Even though it wasn’t what he was expecting, El-Melloi played the game until he cleared it, and jotted down a list of his honest opinions about the game. First on that list was his opinion that “the game’s title leaves something to be desired”.

When he turned the survey card over, he noticed that there was some information about the prizes he could win in those sweepstakes.

If you send in this card, you could be one of 100 lucky winners to receive a replica of a knife with Jack the Ripper’s signature on it! (Sheath included)

Like hell Jack the Ripper would inscribe his name on a knife.

He snorted at the thought. He lost interest in the prize itself, and returned to impassively writing down his thoughts about the game.

And all the while, he was utterly unaware of what that survey card would end up bringing about.

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And then, a few months after that—

Flatt sat in front of the fountain in the park, having a mental conversation with the being in his head.

In just a short while, he seemed to have gotten the hang of the situation, and was speaking naturally with the being.

“So, you’re saying that because you were nobody at all, you gained the power to become anybody at all, huh....”

“Righto. You got lucky, though. If I had manifested as a Servant of any other class, I would have possessed your body and gone on a maddened rampage to... well, in any case, let us just say that I would be swimming in blood by now.”

“Uh....” Flatt found it difficult to interpret that as a joke. He couldn’t help but look around at the faces of the people around him.

Were Jack to go on a rampage, most magi would worry that ordinary people would come to

know of the existence of magic. Flatt, however, found himself relieved for a different reason, one rather atypical of a mage.

“U-um... by the way, what class are you? Are you Assassin?”

“Ah, my apologies. I am of the Berserker class.”

“Huh?”

The Servant’s answer sent Flatt into a tizzy.

Flatt wasn’t a complete ignoramus—he had done some basic research into the Holy Grail War.

He knew that Servants of the Berserker class would gain power in exchange for losing their sanity.

Perhaps Jack understood why Flatt was confused. He began to matter-of-factly explain the nature of his class.

“You see, I was enshrined in legend as a symbol of madness. The class of the maddened warrior is the only one that really fits me.”

“Ah... like how a negative times a negative makes a positive!”

Any ordinary mage... or indeed, any ordinary person would have to wonder if that explanation would fly. Flatt, of course, took it in stride.

This, in turn, surprised Jack, who mumbled something before amending his explanation. “If I were the soul of an actual person, this probably would not have happened. Since I was just an emblem of madness, however, I suppose I was overlooked. It is quite the miracle. Then again, perhaps there is something unique about this Holy Grail War itself.”

“Wow. Servants really are awesome!” As usual, a simple response from Flatt.

Recalling a matter which had made “him” uneasy, the Servant started talking about something else. “By the way, when I appeared before you in the form of a police officer—why did you not attempt to hypnotize me... or use some other form of magical suggestion? Surely that is the most basic sort of magic?”

“Huh? ...Er, well, I figured I should make sure the cop understood what was going on, first.”

“I was worried about your competence for a moment there, lad.”

Flatt, sensing that there was a tinge of embarrassment in the voice in his head, changed the topic of conversation. “So, if you find the Grail, what’ll you wish for?”

“Hrm... as you are my Master, I suppose I ought to inform you... but I beg you, please do not laugh at me.”

The sane Berserker hesitated for a moment before continuing to let his voice echo in Flatt’s head.

“...I want to know who slew those five prostitutes in Whitechapel— in other words, my own

identity. That is all.”

“Your identity...”

“I am a mere fable, with no real presence. And yet, when I think of the people inventing stories and hypotheses about my true identity and nature—it frightens me. I do not expect that you will understand me, given that you have a body and a name and a past to call your own.” His voice sounded meek.

He just wanted to know who he was.

It was an unusual idea, but at the same time, it was likely all that the Servant desired.

Flatt thought for a while. Then, straightforwardly, he asked the Servant a question. “So when you find out who you are, what will you do? Like, if someone summons you somewhere besides a Holy Grail War... will you appear in the body of the person you once were?”

“That may well happen. Though my current form differs from the person I once was, it remains true that I was once a serial killer. The legends about me are all based on that premise. If I am a person of legend who also existed in fact, the onus is upon me to be as true to my reality as possible.” The way he spoke somehow conveyed the impression that he was lonely.

“Doesn’t that just mean there’s no real you?” stated Flatt, straightforwardly and to the point, with no sense of decorum whatsoever.

Flatt was just such an outrageously frank person. The Servant was taken aback, and the voice resounding in Flatt’s head reflected that.

“...Do people ever tell you that you lack decorum?”

“Ahaha, they totally do! All the time! Thanks!”

“I was not commending you... but, well, that is fine. We need not discuss this matter any further. Anyway... I am surprised that you saw fit to summon me. You could expect neither the might of a Hero nor the morality of a man from me.”

It was an eminently reasonable thought.

Never mind that Jack the Ripper himself was the one asking. Anyone would be hesitant even to be around him, and to summon him as a Servant on top of that—

Flatt, frank as frank could be, replied.

“I love people like you! You know, men of mystery with secret identities and all that!”

“...”

“Come on, that’s so cool! Besides, you’re an awesome guy! Isn’t that great!?”

He may have had a mage’s intuition, but his temperament was... not so mage-like.

If there was one way in which his temperament was fitting of a mage—

It was that his intuitions differed ever so slightly from those of most ordinary people.

To phrase it in the most generous way possible, he was gifted with a superabundance of curi-

osity—and magi ought to be curious.

Though it was unclear how the Servant interpreted Flatt's reply—

He, a Servant who should have been composed of pure madness and savagery, readied himself for battle. With the slightest bit of optimism in his voice, he spoke.

"Very well, my Master. Where shall we begin? Using my abilities, we can infiltrate any place whatsoever, and slay the enemy Masters where they stand! I await your orders. What might they be?" The Servant was clearly in high spirits.

His Master, on the other hand, just sat there with a calm smile on his face. Truly, he was the least mage-like of all magi.

"The weather's nice today. Let's just enjoy the sun for a while. It's nice and warm!"

"Wha...!?"

Thus began the journey of a young man who knew nothing of tragedy, and the Villainous Spirit who created nothing but tragedy.

There was just one thing they shared: none stood further from the ideals of the Holy Grail War than they.

That one thing, and nothing else.

Prologue III

“Assassin”

Prologue III: Assassin

In a certain land, there once lived a woman of deep faith.

That was all. That was the whole story.

The devout woman was so pious that she behaved as a heteroclite. And so, the people scorned her as a zealot.

Worse still, even those who worshipped the same god as she looked upon her with contempt.

But the zealot did not hate the people.

The people only hated her because she was yet weak of faith.

She was not pious enough. It was as simple as that.

The zealot forged on, pushing herself even harder.

She sought after the miracles created by her predecessors, and recreated every last one of them.

But her faith was still weak.

It was far, far too weak.

—or at least, that's what the zealot heard, as the world screamed at her.

Every man of faith began to shun the zealot.

My faith is weak.

My faith is weak.

My faith is weak.

In the end, the zealot was unable to do anything. She lived as a zealot, and died as a zealot. Not as a martyr. She lived a life of nothing, and then, she was gone.

And yet, the zealot did not begrudge the world.

She was ashamed of her own weak faith, and gave herself over to the maelstrom of faith once again.

The zealot felt no hate for the people. Only the gods of the heathens drew her ire.

So lived the zealot, irredeemable in the eyes of the common people.

That was the whole story.

That was where her story was supposed to end.

—until the moment when the false Grail chose the zealot.

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Fate/Strange Fake 1

Nighttime — Eastern Snowfield — the Marsh District

The marsh district unfolded to the east of the city center. It was home to many crystal-clear lakes.

In between the lakes were countless swamps. A network of roads was knitted through the district.

Out of all the land surrounding the city, the eastern region—the Marsh District—was likely the most developed; even so, there was not much in the way of civilization save for a few fishing spots and vacation homes.

And on one particular plot of land, there was an enormous vacation home.

A Bounded Field had been established there. Even if an ordinary man were able to detect the home, he would be unable to bring himself to worry about it.

Architecturally speaking, it really was in bad taste. Compared to the lakeshore boarding house a little to the west, it was a bit too Gothic, designed with black and gray motifs.

And—

In the basement of the house, a number of magi were present. They had just completed a summoning ceremony.

The summoning was a success.

All that remained was to answer the Servant's query in the affirmative, thereby completing the contract.

But—

This is strange.

The summoner, a mage by the name of Jester Karture, stared quizzically at the Heroic Spirit he had summoned.

Around ten of his disciples were also present.

And in the center of the summoning circle stood one other figure, clearly neither human nor mage.

An air of intimidation, infinitely deep and pure, emanated from a solitary woman, clad in black robes.

She seemed quite young, but it was difficult to be sure, since she kept her face turned to face the floor.

Right then, Jester felt a severe sense of foreboding.

The summoning should have brought forth an Assassin.

For the most part, it is impossible to pick the class into which a Heroic Spirit is summoned.

But there are exceptions.

With the appropriate preparations and incantations, one can choose to summon either Assassin or Berserker, each of which has a special characteristic that makes this possible.

Accordingly, Jester chose to summon a Servant of the Assassin class.

By their very nature, only a small number of Heroic Spirits can be summoned as Servants of the Assassin class; and at first glance, the being at the center of the summoning circle seemed to be one of those Heroic Spirits, but—

I was under the impression that Assassins always wear a white skull mask....

Heroic Spirits of the Assassin class all clad themselves in a black robe and hide their faces with a skull mask. Jester knew that much from his earlier research.

But the woman before him, though wrapped in black cloth, did not wear a white mask. Her actual face was visible from between the layers of fabric.

In that case, am I supposed to pose the question...?

This was Jester's first time actually experiencing the Holy Grail War. Of course, this Holy Grail War was an imitation from the beginning. It was impossible to anticipate the ways in which it would differ from the War in Japan.

In the first place, it was bizarre that the parties behind this entire war—the stars of the show—had yet to reveal themselves. Jester assumed that a clan at least as renowned as the Einzberns would have been involved in the creation of something so grand and elaborate as this Holy Grail War, but he did not sense the presence of any magi fitting that description.

Perhaps they were hiding themselves well; or perhaps they were watching from afar.

Jester set all of his doubts aside, and waited for the Servant to make a move.

And then—the black-clad woman slowly raised her head. Jester's form was reflected in her pupils.

"I ask of you..."

Her gaze was as powerful as she was intimidating: deep and infinitely black, pure and unpolluted.

The mage unwittingly let out a quiet murmur as he chuckled softly, waiting for the Servant to continue speaking.

"Are you... the mage... who has summoned me... to attain the Holy Grail?"

She rubbed the black cloth wrapped around her mouth and spoke deliberately and delicately.

Relieved that she had finally spoken, Jester stepped forward. Brimming with a newfound confidence, he spread his arms as if to welcome her into this world.

"Indeed, I am. I shall - - - -"

"Delusional Heartbeat."

Fate/Strange Fake 1

The moment she spoke, time stopped.

Jester felt something brush against his chest. He lowered his head to look at it.

What's this?

And then—he saw something Red in front of his torso, and he

NOTICED THAT IT WAS IN FACT HOLDING ONTO SOMETHING RED, AND

HE REALIZED THAT THE THING IT WASHOLDING WAS ACTUALLY HIS

heart, And

He did not raise his head back up. Jester's body collapsed to the ground.

"How...!?"

Seeing their master's body suddenly turn utterly immobile, Jester's disciple-mages panicked. Their eyes grew wide as they looked at the situation unfolding before them.

A third arm, red in color, had sprouted from the woman's back. It extended all the way to Jester's body, and where it brushed against his chest—

How strange. That red hand came to hold a heart—and then crushed it.

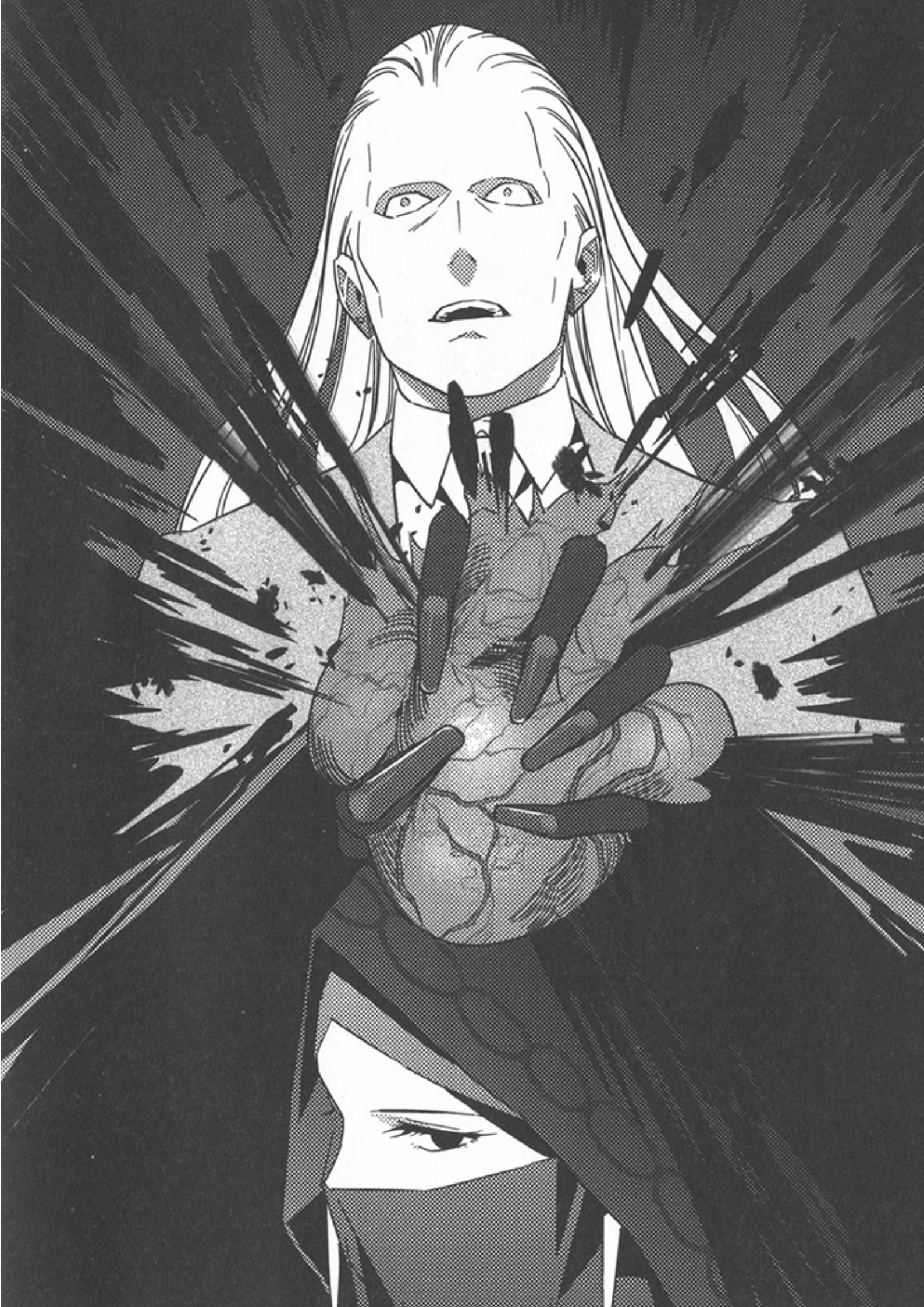
The remaining mages looked at their master's body and at the woman, their gaze flitting back and forth. They cried out, frenziedly.

"Y-you rogue!"

"What did you do to Lord Jester!?"

"Are you not a Servant!?"

As they panicked and shouted, the mages armed themselves with weapons and intensely focused their magical energy.



Fate/Strange Fake 1

As she looked upon Jester's disciples emotionlessly, the black-robed woman said just one thing.

Indeed, it was ephemeral.

"Our god most-compassionate... has no chalice...."

Perhaps they heard her, or perhaps they didn't. Either way, one of the men drew a magical-seeming dagger and leapt towards her, trying to impale her through her back.

And then—

A wet, aberrant sound echoed around the chamber as her shoulders began to warp.

Her left arm reached backwards at an abnormal angle and ever-so gently touched him and—"Cyber Fantasy."

And right away, his head burst into flames and splattered everywhere, accompanied by an explosive noise, as if his head had itself become a bomb.

Hearing the blast and seeing a flash of light, the mages all cowered in fear.

Only two of them had perished—but that was enough to convince them that they were dealing with a real, honest-to-god Servant: a being against which they were utterly powerless.

"I shall cleanse... the heretic magi...."

As she spoke deliberately, she stood still, not moving for some few seconds.

It seemed like she was allowing the magi time to flee—but they did not. In unison, they took a great leap backwards and unleashed the full force of their magical energies on the women.

Witnessing this piteous sight, the black-robed Servant slowly shook her head, an almost-despondent look in her eye—

And yet, without a trace of mercy, she spoke words of power.

"Ichor of Reverie."

And then—silence descended upon the chamber.

The black-clad Servant was surrounded by the corpses of magi.

All of the mages that had tried to release their magical energy upon her had—for some reason—been consumed by their own mighty flames. Their remains were strewn about the floor.

The only one who had any idea what happened was the Servant. She hastened up the stairs out of the basement, still silent.

She reverted to her spirit form, and, unseen by anyone—

She raced off into the darkness of the night. She, who once had no direction in her life, had finally found a definite purpose.

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The zealot sought proof.

Proof that she was truly a person of faith; proof that she was one of Allah's people. Nothing more.

It was not until much, much later that she realized that her search for proof was itself evidence that her faith was weak.

When she was young, she honed herself, so as to earn a name—a name that would serve as a proof of her faith.

In order to attain that name, which would evidence her piety, she would have to attain power—power enough to perform a divine miracle.

However, only a particular, special sort of miracle would suffice.

It had to be a miracle that could bring death, swiftly and reliably; a miracle greater than any known to a *zindiq* or *mohareb*.

She was a member of a sect that pursued such miracles: the Hashshashin, a cult that was zealous by its very nature.

Even in the innermost circles of the cult, however, she was scorned as a zealot among zealots.

The past grandmasters of the cult had all performed a miracle bearing the name of *Shaytān*, and in doing so earned their titles.

Each and every one of them was shocked by her deeds.

None of them was prepared to believe what they had seen. She was but a young girl, a mere lamb—

How could she master all the miracles performed by the preceding 18 grandmasters?

There was no question that she had honed herself with the most Herculean of efforts.

It went without saying that she had spilled much of her pure, uncorrupted blood in the process.

And yet, the people of her sect would not recognize her as a grandmaster.

“What have you accomplished? You have imitated miracles already performed. That is naught but rote. It is because your faith is weak that you are unable to bring forth a miracle of your own contrivance.” She was certainly talented.

That is to say, she had talent enough to master the abilities of all the grandmasters of the past. She had the strength to bear the pain she went through as she mortified her flesh. She had the fortitude to face any hardship through strength and willpower. But she was not endowed with the talent needed to bring about a miracle of her own invention.

That was only half the problem. Her ability to master so many miracles, when mastery of a single one would take an ordinary person a lifetime—that was the other half. The people may well have feared her, knowing that she was able to achieve those miracles in a matter of years.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

“And thus, you are weak of faith. We cannot bestow the title of grandmaster unto one such as yourself.”

That argument was mere sophistry. And yet, she accepted it wholeheartedly.

I see. My faith is not deep enough.

How much I have yet to learn. I have brought shame upon the miracles of the former grandmasters.

She did not resent anyone else. She merely continued to hone her own abilities.

And when a new grandmaster—the Hundred-Faced—was selected—

She saw that he was capable of all manner of things, things she could not do herself, but she did not envy him. She only felt shame at her own impiety.

In the end, the zealot found no proof of her faith, and vanished into the mists of time.

Or so it should have been—

But, what a quirk of fate! When she was summoned by the man called Jester, she was given knowledge of the world by the Holy Grail, and immediately came to know her destiny.

She had to bring the Holy Grail—that emblem of heresy—unto naught. That was all she desired.

And though she was not unaware that the past grandmasters had all sought it— she felt only sorrow.

She did not resent those grandmasters. Neither did she revile them.

Their faith was, without a doubt, deeper than hers. Even now, they were worthy of her respect.

Her hatred was directed at that which had led them astray: the Holy Grail War.

She had to put an end to it. She tore through the dark of the night, hastening forth in search of the Holy Grail.

Given that she had slain those magi, she would soon lose her supply of magical energy.

She was still receiving magical energy, but it was a mere trickle.

When the flow of magical energy came to a complete stop, she would vanish.

Would that happen after a few days? A few hours? A few seconds, even—?

But it mattered not.

Until her last moment,

Even if her body was a mere apparition—

The nameless Assassin would not question her purpose.

Believing that the piety of at least those who, like herself, had been faithful would be rewarded,

She, without a moment’s hesitation, made the Holy Grail War itself her enemy.

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A few minutes later.

In the basement of the lakeside cottage where the nameless Heroic Spirit was summoned, there were no men; only corpses.

By the time Assassin departed, this became an even more certain truth.

“Kha!”

A pristine laugh rang out.

But the truth was what it was.

In that room, there were no men; only corpses.

“Khaa! Ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

A peal of laughter echoed. It sounded like the laugh of a child, jubilant from the bottom of its heart; but at the same time, it was warped— somehow perverted.

But the truth was still what it was.

In that room, there were no men; only corpses.

“Wow, that was a surprise! To think that the Holy Grail would bring me such a kooky little maverick!”

The man bounded up like a jack-in-the-box, the Command Spells on his right hand still gleaming.

“How beautiful...”

I was planning on awakening the Spider with the power of the Grail and living to see this tiresome world be destroyed, but....

I had no idea I still had “emotions”—those vestiges of humanity!

He trembled, beset by emotions— and the truth remained what it was.

In that room, there were no men; only corpses.

Given that the truth was what it was, it could only mean one thing. The mage Jester Karturei, now choked with emotion, was, at this point, a corpse.

“What pathos! What pulchritude! How bewitching, resplendent, dainty, picturesque, cute! Oh, what a tragic mistake I have made— when I once had so much time and so little to do, I should have mastered the *Ars Poetica*! I cannot find the words to describe her piety!”

Jester was having the time of his life. Paying no heed to the corpses scattered around the room, he began to unbutton his shirt. Magical looking emblems appeared on his bare chest— emblems that were entirely unlike Command Spells.

It was a ring of six red marks, similar in form to the cylinder of a six-shooter.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

However, one of the six marks—the one closest to his left breast— had turned dark.

“She crushed my concept-nucleus with such ease! I was as careful as I could be! And it didn’t even matter! With her arm, she could return even a being far stronger than me to naught!”

Jester touched the darkened mark with a finger, whereupon his fingertip was sucked into the skin of his chest. Strangely, not a drop of blood fell from the mark. He shoved his hand up to the wrist into the muddy flesh-colored morass and squelched at his own innards.

“My mage-soul has been utterly destroyed.”

Then, like a gear, or indeed, like a revolver, the six marks rotated, almost as though they were wriggling. The darkened mark shifted to his left flank, loading a new red mark on his left breast.

“In that case, I had best put on a new face from here on out.”

And then, somehow—just as those six marks had moved, his body and face pulsed. A moment later, he had the appearance of an entirely different man.

He withdrew his finger from his chest and placed it on the darkened seal at his side. He was in a state of ecstasy as he rubbed his finger around it.

“That concept-nucleus was shielded by countless layers of protective magic. And despite that, she made all of that as unto less than nothing with that red arm. Her fingers reached the very core of my being.... An arm so simple, and yet ever so fiendish! And yet—nay, thus!—it is beautiful! A Noble Phantasm—what a thing!”

He continued to speak to the corpses strewn around him, with a clear, resounding voice. Of course, they did not respond.

“I am surprised that she was able to use that fearsome technique without hesitation, and so many times at that. Had she access only to the energy of any other mage—an ordinary one, unlike myself... she surely would have run out almost right away.”

He flashed his unusually-sharp canines at the altar of corpses. He continued to talk to himself in a booming—and almost bewitching— voice.

“I suppose I need not tire of the world quite yet.... That beautiful assassin! Her piety! Nary could I allow her to vanish without a name!”

That—was a statement that could only be made by those who had seen her memories.

Via the linkage of magical energy that connected a Master and Servant, the former could view the latter’s thoughts and memories as though they were dreams.

“Of course not! Who would dare let such a thing go to waste!?”

If Jester spoke true, it would mean that he had learned of her faith through a dream he had while he was dead, but—

“I shall grant you a name! Your beautiful face; your beautiful soul; your beautiful power; your beautiful faith... I will desecrate them and defile them and derogate them and debauch

them and degrade them all! What greater pleasure could there be!?”

He laughed heartily. His visage gradually took on a wicked color.

“O pleasure! O impermanence! O beauty! I will make that beautiful Servant kneel before me, and I will destroy her faith, and when I have drained the last of her power, what a sight that will be!”

Jester’s heart beat to a euphoric rhythm as a shadow extended from the ground beneath his feet.

It was a red shadow—a red as supremely deep as the emblems on his chest.

When the shadow finally wrapped itself around the bodies of all of Jester’s disciples, it divorced itself from the ground, and became a crimson wave that engulfed the countless corpses.

And then, right away, the shadow withdrew back into Jester’s body. As it did, it was a yet-deeper red than before.

In just seconds, the bodies had been reduced to mere skeletons by that inexorable shadow.

“The Holy Grail? The destruction of the world? Those, too, are wonderful! This, I grant! But what trifles they are! They are mere dreck before her despair!”

And then—

He, a living corpse—a vampire —climaxed from envisioning the taste of the Servant’s blood, as his dead eyes glowed bright with life.

“As fellow heretics in this land, let us be the best of friends! Khaa... Khahahahahahahahaha-hahaha!”

And so, with nary a proper contract binding them—

Assassin’s Master infused the Holy Grail War with a toxic darkness. Laughing and laughing and—

Prologue IV

“Caster”

Prologue IV: Caster

The room was dark.

Through a small gap in the window blinds, the roof of the neighboring high-rise was visible.

Judging from the backdrop behind the neighboring high-rise, it seemed that the room was rather high up, and located at the center of the city of Snowfield.

The stars shone outside the window.

The room, illuminated by the pale starlight, felt something like a modern office.

From the rows of desks with computers to the air conditioning unit on the ceiling, nothing seemed unusual about the room. One could easily forget that this room was also part of the stage atop which the Holy Grail War would be enacted.

However, none of the fluorescent lights on the ceiling were illuminated. The dignified voice of a leaderly man resounded through the darkness—

As if to say that this city itself was the Holy Grail War.

“Well, then... it seems that the other five Servants have been summoned,” said the man. He spoke with great gravitas.

“Indeed. As of this time, the only Master whose identity we have been able to confirm is Tiné Chelc, who brought the King of Heroes under her control. We have been unable to establish contact with Mr. and Mrs. Kuruoka, who had planned to ally with us in the War. We are aware of multiple other magi in the city, but regrettably, we have been unable to determine which of them, if any, possess Command Spells,” replied a humble voice from the darkness.

“Is that so,” replied the man, with barely-concealed frustration and disappointment in his voice. “The city-wide surveillance system is surprisingly impotent.”

The other individual calmly continued to deliver her report. “We did observe one mage who, in a park in broad daylight, displayed his Command Spells and summoned a Servant. However, the Servant performed some variety of unusual illusions, without revealing itself. In doing so, it evaded our agent who was situated there, disguised as a sunbather. At first we thought the mage to be a fool, but it seems that he is quite capable.”

“And you have not identified the Heroic Spirit? Nor any of its characteristics?”

“I am afraid not. Furthermore, with regards to the first Heroic Spirit summoned—even though the summoning took place in the city, we were unable to make heads or tails of the surveillance data. We are certain that the Heroic Spirit was summoned, but we have been unable to ascertain anything else, not even its location.”

“Hm.... I presume this to be the doing of those governmental interlopers, judging from that ‘declaration’ of theirs.”

Fate/Strange Fake 1

He must have been referring to the incident with Rohngall and Faldeus some days prior. However, the other person, his subordinate, shook her head, responding in the negative.

"I am afraid that cannot be so. The first summoning occurred essentially at the same time as the issuance of their declaration."

"...In that case, it is most likely that the first summoning was performed by the Kuruoka family." He stood up quietly, a sour look on his face, and went on. "So be it. In any case, the greatest obstacle facing us is the King of Heroes. We need only to eliminate him."

"Aye."

Silence was about to descend over the room—when, suddenly, the phone began to ring.

The leaderly man reluctantly picked up the receiver and, in a most businesslike manner, said, "...it's me."

"Sup, bro! How ya doin'?"

The man made a show of furrowing his brow. "Caster. What do you want?" he replied.

"Come on man, don't be like that! Listen. I was just watching the boob tube, and guess what?! They said that some of the babelicious broads around these parts cost millions of smackers a night! Is that legit!?"

"...what if it is?"

"Call one in for me tonight, bro. Help a brutha' out." The man on the other side of the phone was blunt. Very blunt.

"I am no brother of yours." The leaderly man's cheek twitched.

"Why not, man? Don't tell me you forgot about how we made a blood oath! We're blood brothers! You know, I like the sound of that— blood brothers. I looked it up on the internet— apparently people do this sort of stuff in Scandinavia all the time. I dig it!"

"...You, a Heroic Spirit, forged a contract with me, your Master. That is the precise extent of our relationship." His temples twitched as his grip on the receiver grew firmer.

There were Command Spells boldly visible on the back of his hand, forming a shape evocative of chains.

In that case, the man on the other side of the phone must have been his Servant. It was strange that they were so distant from one another, both in terms of physical distance and in terms of their relationship—it was unusual for a Master and Servant to converse by phone.

The Servant grumbled, "You just don't get it, man," before resuming the conversation at a rapid-fire pace, putting pressure on his Master.

"Don't get me wrong, okay? My job is to make Heroes. I sure as heck am not a Hero myself. But if you want to treat me like a hero, that is A-OK. 'Specially when it comes to the ladies. No, wait, come to think of it, of course I'm a hero! I mean, come on—how can a guy boink a hun-

dred chicks and make a thousand babies and not be a hero to forever-aloners!”

“Enough with the implausible tall tales. If you have time to tell lies, you have time to work. Return to your duties.”

“Yeesh! I’ve gotta keep doing that? Step into my shoes for a bit, man! Listen. All I want from the Holy Grail is good food and hot babes. More importantly, I want to see what kind of drama comes out of this war, and what happens to all the participants in the end. That’s all! But at this rate, I’m gonna go mad from all this work before the war ends!”

Caster’s Master sighed and humored Caster, acknowledging his complaints. “I will prepare women and food for you. Now, return to your work with all due speed. Produce weapons ever more sublime. ”

“Man, you’re a real wet blanket. You know, this isn’t even my specialty. Don’t forget that, kay? Besides, if you wanted a counterfeiter, there are better people out there! So I was on the internet yesterday, and I read about this guy named Elmyr de Hory. And plus, I heard a rumor—apparently, there’s another guy who can use some kind of super-ultra-awesome magic to copy things over and over again. “

“A mere copy is of no value to us. A counterfeit that does not surpass the original object will be of no avail against the King of Heroes.” “Ha! So ya like my adaptations, huh?! I’m so happy I could cry. Not! Go screw the pooch, why don’tcha! Ah, bugger. If I’d known this would happen, I wouldn’t have joked about my stories being better than the real thing back when they made all that racket about forgeries. I mean, shit. I’d put that incident a hundred years behind me, and I was totally getting down and dirty with Cleopatra and Yang Guifei, and then you come along and drag me out of bed. And look at me now! I’m here slaving away, doing your dirty work! I was not expecting that, man! This is a load of crap. Who’d want to hear a story like this?! Gimme a break!”

“Do not misunderstand me. I chose you not because of those anecdotes about your life. Quite simply—you are one who can create legends that exceed the legends of old. I believe that you have the power to invent tales that surpass even the greatest legends of old—and the power to give form to those tales,” his Master replied, quelling his frustration. He had immediately recognized that Caster’s tales were full of lies.



“Ha! Look, bro, I don’t give a rat’s behind about your compliments. Hey, I’ve got an idea! Why don’t you take those compliments and write a book based on them? And then go ahead and read it to your old lady. While she’s in bed with me, that is! ...Actually, if you’re going to do that, show me a draft first. See, I’m a lot better with fixing crappy scripts than I am at writing legends, so “

The man did not hear Caster out to the very end, hanging up the receiver mid-sentence.

The flood of words receded, leaving the room utterly silent once again.

The man went on to speak into the darkness of the room, acting as though his conversation with Caster had never happened.

“Gilgamesh: the king of Heroes.... It seems that his nameless sword and his infinite treasury shall prove to be our greatest obstacle.”

The man stood up from his chair once again, and slowly paced around the room with his hands behind his back.

“As such, I shall have no choice but to overwhelm him with numbers before he draws his sword. We must use every means available to us to lure him into a state of weakness—and then we will murder him, honorably.”

With every step he took, he left a powerful—even intimidating—aura. It was as though the darkness itself glowed the color of exigency.

“However, mere numbers will not suffice to defeat him. After all, on top of being unaffected by physical attacks, Heroic Spirits are immeasurably stronger than even the finest athletes. Of course, the Caster I have summoned is an exception. In a brawl, I should imagine that even I might have the upper hand... but that is not my concern now.” He glanced askance, as if he had said something he should not have. He then collected himself and continued to pace.

“Then again... what if men could master the use of Noble Phantasms?”

In the context of the Holy Grail War, a “Noble Phantasm” was a nigh-godlike ability possessed by each Hero. Take, for example, the sword Ama-no-Murakumo from the legend of Yamato Takeru. It, like, all Noble Phantasms, is a symbol of the Hero that wields it, and draws out the greatest powers of its wielder.

Naturally, they are not the sorts of things one could find lying around in gun shops or antique shops. Indeed, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that summoning a Servant is equivalent to summoning a Noble Phantasm. So immense is the power of a Noble Phantasm—a wild card that can turn the tide of battle.

“Suppose, furthermore, that each of those weapons were more powerful than the original items on which they were based. What then?”

Having walked deep into the darkness of the room, the man stopped before a wall, and—

Fate/Strange Fake 1

He raised his right hand—the hand on which were inscribed his Command Spells—and flipped a switch. The room lit up.

In the room, suddenly awash with light—

A line of people extended from one end of the expansive room to the other. Each one of them was clad in black.

They were not the black robes typical of magi, however—a distinctive piece of equipment hung from each of their waists, like an emblem of authority.

Men and women stood there in no particular order. All in all, there were perhaps 30 people in that lineup of police officers.

Each of them stood at attention, their black uniforms exuding an impressive aura. Each one held in their hands a weapon, each of a different type.

What a bizarre sight.

Those utterly stony-faced uniformed police officers held swords, bows, shields, spears, chains, scythes, and bludgeons, among other things. What's more, they all had a pair of handcuffs and a pistol holstered at their belts. They had long since passed “unfitting” and were well into the realm of “absurd”. One of them even had a golden arquebus over his shoulder. It was like they were entertainers in police garb, on their way to a performance to promote tourism in the Snowfield area.

Odds are, however, that any half-decent mage that saw them would not laugh, but rather, would faint.

A power that had been tempered with magical energy and vitality seeped out of the weapons they were carrying, as if to erode the very air within the room.

Those Noble Phantasms were all counterfeits.

Even so, they were mightier than their originating legends.

“Clan Calatin: the Twenty-Eight Monstrosities”

“Those were the warriors of Celtic myth who crossed swords with Cú Chulainn. Effective immediately, that will be your codename.”

As he gazed upon that overwhelming yet out-of-place power with satisfaction—

He—the police chief of Snowfield—spread his arms wide and issued a booming declaration.

“Though my words may mean little, as police chief, I shall guarantee this. As a mage, I swear this.”

“You are justice incarnate.”

Upon hearing that, the entire line of police officers stamped their feet in perfect unison. As one, they saluted the police chief, who was their Master, and at the same time, their master.

And upon witnessing that action, any discerning person would have come to understand.

They were not mere police officers; rather, they had undergone some sort of special training beyond what was typical in their profession.

Their organization had established a “net” that ensconced the entire city.

All they required of the Servant was his talent of Noble Phantasm creation, a task with which the magi under their control had assisted.

In other words—

Mere humans though they were, they would defeat Heroic Spirits, thus shaking the very foundations of the Holy Grail War.

In the end, what destiny awaited them—?

That was a story that the man summoned as Caster had not yet finished writing.

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Even an unwritten story, however, has an audience.

After the officers had left, the room echoed to the sound of delicate applause.

“...What are you doing here?” The chief grumbled vexedly without turning to look. Obvious disgust showed through in his voice, which he loaded with enough pressure to crush the soul of a small animal.

Thereupon, the owner of the applause poked her face out of the shadows.

“What’s this? It kind of feels like you’re giving me the cold shoulder. Can’t I drop in even if I don’t have business?”

It was a girl who appeared to be in her mid-teens. She wore a gothic lolita-style dress with black and white keynotes, and clasped an over-decorated umbrella despite being indoors.

“At the very least, this is no place for outsiders.”

“Oh, so I’m an outsider now? You’ve sure gotten high and mighty, newbie.”

The girl giggled and twirled her umbrella. Despite her peevish remarks, she gave the impression of being in high spirits.

“Still, that was a masterpiece. How’d it go? ‘You are justice’? What a performance. If I was judging the Golden Raspberry Awards, I wouldn’t hesitate to nominate you for Worst Actor!”

“I wasn’t trying to put on a show. I only stated the truth.”

“Oh? What’s this? Could it be that you seriously believe you’re justice? You’re one of the perpetrators of this grand scam, remember.”

“I am.”

The girl burst into a cackle at the chief’s unflinching response.

“Wow! I wish I had your nerve! That’s not very patriotic, is it? I mean, if you really loved this

Fate/Strange Fake 1

country, you'd never call all this 'just'!"

"It may be true that I am no patriot, and no pious man of God, but I do take pride in the fact that my actions are the results of just beliefs." Sounding more as if he was trying to convince himself than the girl, the chief continued: "Of course, I won't claim that our justice matches the Grail's. Should circumstances demand it, we may end up making enemies of not only the Association and the Church, but the Grail War system itself as well."

"Don't worry so much. Ruler won't be in this War."

The girl waved a hand as she spoke, as if to mock the words the chief had uttered with such determination.

"What?"

The next instant, the tone of the girl's smile suddenly changed.

"And even if Ruler does show up after it switches over to the real Grail War, it'll be too late."

It was still an innocent smile, but now it had taken on the cruel look of a child rhythmically stomping on a line of ants.

"The Snowfield Holy Grail War will be elevated from a fake to the real deal, and veer off course. Once that happens, Ruler won't be able to stop it, or even intervene. We'll be able to rape the Grail War all we want!" Her breath whitened as she went on triumphantly, sunk in ecstasy. "Don't you see how wonderful this is? I never thought I'd get another chance to have my way with that holy maiden, then turn her into a pile of cinders that aren't even good for pig slop! Oh, it's incredible! It's the best! I hope Ruler does come! I couldn't manage to break her spirit back then, but this time she won't be a hero whose work is done! She'll die as a Ruler who wasn't able to do her duty! I'm sure that will get to her!"



Fate/Strange Fake 1

At that point, her smile suddenly returned to normal and her excitement leveled out.

"Don't you think it's just wonderful?" She asked the chief.

His answer, however, was curt.

"...I will do it if it becomes necessary, but I do not consider it a laudable action."

"You're so uptight. A real stick in the mud," the girl teasingly addressed him, twirling her umbrella. "Don't you ever get tired of being a hero? It's so much easier when you know you're the bad guy, you know? Whatever you do, you can just pass it off with a 'Because I'm the bad guy.' Acting crazy is easy, too. You can just pass off anything you do with a 'Because I'm crazy.'"

Then, with a malicious narrowing of her eyes, she added a final, sarcastic remark.

"Oh, but justice works the same way! Sorry about that!"

With that, the girl turned to go, but she abruptly stopped, looked back, and asked the chief:

"Oh, that's right, didn't Mr. Fake Caster want a woman? If he does, why don't I go and keep him company?"

"Hurry up and return to headquarters. Without any unnecessary detours."

Getting a response pregnant with rage so intense it was practically homicidal, the girl shrugged her shoulders and turned her back on the chief again.

"Yes, yes, I'll wait my turn like a good girl..."

After he had watched the girl open the door normally and go, the chief spat:

"Play the mastermind as long as you can, you old bitch."

But there was no smile on his face, and no sense of composure... Anyone who saw him would have taken his words for the excuses of a sore loser.

But even if they were, his mind would remain unclouded. His conviction had already reached a place beyond his pride, or even his life.

Prologue V

“Rider”

Prologue V: Rider

In conclusion, “he” was a being as foreign as could be.

“He” was summoned to this false Holy Grail War as a Servant of the Rider class.

“His” existence was proof that this Holy Grail War was false; proof that there was nothing less worthy of the title “Holy Grail” than the object of this War.

Only in name was “he” a Heroic Spirit, and “he” was not by any means a Hero.

Then, a Villainous Spirit? A Demonic Spirit? Nay. Neither term suffices to describe “him”. In some places, “he” was described as a “curse”, while in some religions, “he” was said to be “divine punishment”.

In the Holy Grail War, Servants are selected from the past and the future—from every age of mankind’s history.

The classes into which the Servants are summoned transcend time. A Hero of the past, known only via lore, may be summoned, as may a Hero of the future, not yet born into this world. If the Holy Grail War had existed when Amakusa Shirou lived, he may have even been able to summon his more powerful future self, an icon of heroism.

From that perspective—“he” had existed since time immemorial, and “he” would likely continue to exist far into the future. “He” lived a shorter life than anyone, and “he” lived a longer life than anyone.

And so, “he”—a being with physical presence, though not a Heroic Spirit—

Even at this very moment—there is no doubt that “he” continues to take the lives of those that live on this planet.

Indeed, perhaps “he” does so that “he” may “himself” provide nourishment for life to begin anew.

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How beautiful.

Thus thought a certain young girl as she gazed upon that which sprawled before her.

It was a city she was familiar with.

It was the city where she was raised. Ever so many buildings towered over her, scraping the vast sky above with such vigor that they seemed ready to swallow her up too.

A pair of six-lane causeways met at a mighty intersection. The primary north-south and east-west arterial roads of the City of Snowfield met there, not far from the city center. From the skies above, the roads would seem to form an enormous crucifix, identifying the nexus of the city.

An observer looking only upon those grand roadways might well think himself to be in a city as grand as New York or Chicago. Indeed, those roads raced past the city limits into the multifarious natural environments surrounding Snowfield with such ardor, it was as though they had asserted that they were a part of those surroundings—nay, that they were in fact the culmination, the perfection of all nature.

But—something was amiss.

And the girl found this city, this familiar city, to be beautiful precisely because something was amiss.

She stood at the center of the enormous intersection, which was itself at the center of the city.

It was a scramble intersection, allowing pedestrians to cross it in every which way—but, of course, vehicular traffic would resume at some point, forcing one to vacate the road.

And yet, she had stood there for more than ten minutes.

The traffic lights had cycled any number of times.

But—silence reigned. Not a single car honked at her. And that was as it should be—

For there was not a single human anywhere to be seen.

An empty intersection.

A road devoid of vehicles.

Did she notice that it was silent? Then again, did she even notice that it was odorless?

From the middle of the road, it was clear that the causeways lacked any human presence.

The girl imagined an asphalt-colored red carpet, a most contradictory thing. She was overwhelmed by the beauty of the complex of tall buildings before her.

In the absence of people, concrete—that symbol of humankind—seemed like a beautiful object of nature, sprung from the Earth's surface.

If a building were a tree, what a grand, harmonious forest this city would be. In that case, the city hall tower, tallest of them all, would be a veteran among them.

She knew not why she was there.

Hence, she wandered the town in search of an answer.

But that brought sadness unto her.

Though she found this world beautiful in its lack of people, she also found it lonely.

At first, she felt nothing but loneliness; within a few days, though, she had grown accustomed to it.

Indeed. She had wandered this empty town for a long, long time.

After about three months, she had stopped counting the days.

She was never struck by hunger, though she knew not why. During the day she would wan-

Fate/Strange Fake 1

der the town, and come dusk, she would sleep.

At night, lights would go on in the empty buildings. She would look up at the night sky and be comforted by the stars. Few things are more unsettling than witnessing lights go on in a building empty of people, but she had long since grown used to it, faced with the absurdity of a city empty of people.

As loneliness departed her heart, the void it left was filled by the pleasure she felt from being in this empty city.

After looking about the city a while, she lay down in the middle of the intersection and idly gazed up at the night sky

— Daddy. Mommy.

The faces of her parents came to mind.

— I'm sorry. I couldn't do it right.

Her first instinct was to apologize.

But then, she realized that she wasn't even doing anything she should apologize for, and—.

Two old emotions welled up within her.

One was loneliness, stemming from the impossibility of encountering anyone else. The other was—

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Snowfield Central Hospital

An enormous edifice stood in the central district of the City of Snowfield, covered in white paint.

At a glance, it looked very much like an art museum. In fact, however, it was a large hospital, furnished with the finest equipment in the city.

It was a castle of healing. Multitudes of patients knocked at its gates, seeking treatment from surgeons and psychosomaticists and all sorts of other specialists.

Of course, not all the patients came for elective procedures. Many were brought to the hospital for other reasons.

“...I am afraid that I must inform you that it will be difficult for your daughter to regain consciousness from this state,” said a doctor to a man and a woman.

They glanced at each other. They were probably in their thirties, and seemed to be from East Asia. They seemed more than a little flustered.

“As of today, our daughter has been hospitalized for one full year.... Is that a sign that her

condition has taken a turn for the worse?” asked the man, in fluent English.

“...Physically speaking, there are no symptoms that would suggest your daughter’s condition is worsening. Nonetheless, it becomes more difficult to recover from a coma as the duration of the coma increases.”

The patient had been under her care for a full year now, and had yet to recover consciousness. She had entered a vegetative state. Only her body continued to develop, and that too, at a slow pace.

She was just ten years and three months of age.

Who knows what happened to her. One day, she abruptly lost consciousness and wouldn’t wake up, and so, her parents, terrified, brought her to this hospital.

An examination revealed that her body was studded with lesions, particularly around her cranium.

After performing a biopsy on one of the lesions, it was found that they were caused by an unknown strain of bacteria. The doctors all panicked, fearing an epidemic within the hospital.

In the end, the bacteria turned out not to be contagious, leaving it a mystery as to how the girl herself became infected in the first place. The doctors considered having a hospital with even more advanced facilities examine her, but for whatever reason, they were denied access, and so, the girl remained under observation in this municipal hospital.

“We have not observed any changes in the state of the bacterial infestation. Unfortunately, this means that the bacteria will continue to impede her cerebral function going forward. The bacteria have not caused so much damage as to induce necrosis; nonetheless, they have severely impeded her mental functions.” The doctor spoke as soothingly as she could.

“Is that so....” replied the woman, worry permeating her voice.

“Keep in mind, this doesn’t mean that recovery is impossible. There have been cases where a patient has been in a vegetative state for over 10 years before regaining consciousness. As we learn more about the genome of the bacterium, more treatment options will become available to us. Please, don’t lose hope.” She was doing her best to keep their spirits up, but—

The patient’s father looked ever more disconsolate.

“Never mind her consciousness... are her reproductive functions still intact?” he asked.

“...Pardon?”

For a moment, she didn’t understand what she was being asked.

She simply could not grasp what he had meant by “never mind her consciousness”. For a short while, there was a powerful silence.

Before long, the man spoke again, unwilling to let the silence drag on. Rephrasing his question in greater detail, he said, “I would like to know whether or not her ovaries and uterus—or

Fate/Strange Fake 1

at the very least, just her ovaries—are developing normally.”

“Er... well, the lesions are only inhibiting growth in the part of her brain to which they are localized, so there haven’t been any adverse effects on her other organs, but...” The doctor just told him the facts as they were, still unable to figure out why he was asking about that. But—

Upon hearing her response, the patient’s parents looked at each other once again. Their faces lit up.

“Really!? Well, in that case, thank you ever so much! We will continue to pay her hospital bills as we have been, so please, continue taking good care of our daughter!”

“I’m sorry? That’s not... I mean...”

“We are truly grateful to you, doctor. There, you see, dear? You don’t need to worry about that anymore.”

“Right you are, honey. Let’s get going... we need to make preparations for tonight.”

The young couple waltzed out of the hospital in high spirits, leaving behind the utterly perplexed doctor.

She had no idea what would be appropriate to say to them, and so, she just stared at them as they departed.

“Goodness me.... What was the matter with them...?”

Perhaps the shock of finding their daughter comatose had left them all muddled up. The next time they came to the hospital, she would have to recommend that they attend counseling.

As she thought about the peculiar couple, she stepped through the exterior door to the sterile room.

After being sprayed with a disinfecting gas and scoured with ultraviolet light, the interior door opened, to reveal a single bed.

On the bed lay a sleeping girl with an IV drip.

Though it seemed at first glance as though she was merely asleep, her face was emaciated and lifeless, and it did not seem as though she would ever regain consciousness.

“...Even if your parents abandon you, I won’t. I’ll never give up on you.”

The only sound emanating from the girl was the sound of her breath. As the doctor looked at her, she checked her IV drip and her vitals with a renewed determination.

And then—she discovered something unusual.

“...oh?”

She noticed the abnormality while she was repositioning the girl.

Something red appeared on the right hand of the motionless girl.

“What... are these...?”

She took a closer look at the girl’s hand. There, she saw crimson sigils that reminded her of loops of chain.

“A tattoo...? But who?”

Access to the girl’s room was strictly controlled, and there was no way anybody could have brought tattoo implements inside. Besides— when she had checked on the girl that same morning, there was certainly nothing out of the ordinary. A chill ran down her spine.

“Is this... some kind of... prank?”

And though there was no way she could even have known that magi actually existed—

Those marks were, without a doubt, Command Spells.

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The other was a blend of pain and fear.

She was still a young girl, but when she remembered what her parents had done to her when she was younger still—

That was certainly not cruelty. Rather, it was rationally-applied love.

““We will make you into an illustrious mage.””

They showered her with love as they spoke those words. Though she was young, she understood that.

And yet, the pain ate away at her.

The pain the pain the pain pain pain pain pain dominated her childhood. Even though she must have had pleasant memories, happy memories, and sad memories, they were all over written by overwhelming pain.

“I’m sorry. I’ll do it right, so...”

Even when she tried to forget, she could not overcome the pain.

If it had been mere cruelty, she may have been able to seal all of that away.

Unfortunately for her, she really did feel that her parents loved her.

Indeed, that was why she could not flee. She could do nothing but suffer through it.

From a young age, she believed that she could reciprocate her parents’ love by suffering.

Alas, she did not understand that her parents did not love her as a person. They only loved her as a vessel for the continuance of their family line—as their future in the world of magic.

Her parents both carried a magical pedigree, and indeed, were among those that made off

Fate/Strange Fake 1

with some of the machinery underlying the actual Holy Grail War.

The knowledge they gained was relevant not just to the Holy Grail War—they had also acquired part of a certain mage's system of entomomancy, and quickly adapted it to their own use.

Their goal: to develop a new way to modify the flesh using even smaller bugs.

And after decades of trial and error—they were finally on their way to perfecting a sort of pseudo-entomomancy.

They used magically-modified bacteria that would better their host.

If they were properly used in the body of a young mage, they would amplify the mage's Magic Circuits. That was their plan.

Once they had perfected their techniques, they chose their firstborn daughter as their distinguished first test subject. She experienced great agony. Though her body was scarcely altered, her Magic Circuits had been amplified beyond measure.

As she grew up, her Magic Circuits approached completion. All that was left was for her to inherit the magic of her family. Then, their plan would have been a perfect success, but—

Unluckily for them, they lost control of some of the bacteria, and so the still-young girl was deprived of her consciousness.

In order to ensure that it would remain possible for their daughter, with her amplified Magic Circuits, to succeed them, her parents hospitalized her. Of course, by this point, her parents had no interest in her as a person.

And then—

As yet unaware that her parents had all but forsaken her, she wandered on and on in the world of her dreams, a cleft between life and death.

Perhaps because of how the bacteria modified her, her dreams were far and away more realistic than any ordinary dream. In the end, though, it was but a world in which she could neither taste nor smell.

It was but a dream.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry... I'm sorry for hurting...!"

As she experienced flashbacks to her past, she screamed out into the empty world. Though she brimmed with magical energy, she lacked knowledge. She was a witch—but a powerless one.

In her dream, she mustered all the strength she had—and she screamed. On and on.

As if to support her, her altered body made her Magic Circuits run wild in the world of her dreams.

As if they recognized they were going to vanish; as if they were mere children crying out

“Don’t leave me!”—every cell in her body cried out.

“I’ll do it right! I will, I’ll bear the pain!”

And though she did not know what it was she should do right— “So please, please don’t leave me! Don’t leave me...!”

Then—she saw a flash of light.

There was a mighty gust of wind—a roar in a soundless world.

She didn’t know what was going on. She leapt to her feet, and looked around the intersection and—

All of the roads were covered in a black fog.

Something had changed, but she couldn’t understand what it was.

As she stood there utterly stupefied, a voice rang out.

It was a grating sound, like the scraping noise of swarms of insects battling one another.

And yet, those were words—words with meaning.

“ I A S K : A R E Y O U M Y M A S T E R ? ”

She could not have known what those words meant, and yet— That Servant was bizarre beyond measure.

To begin with, “he” lacked a persona—let alone the nature of a Hero.

After all, “he” was not a human in the first place.

When “he” was granted knowledge by the Holy Grail, however, “he” appeared as a Servant, in the form of a formless mass of awareness. “He” had neither emotions nor even internal monologue. “He” was a mere mass of knowledge about the Holy Grail War, created by the system—something like a robot.

The words “he” spoke were like dread incarnate, but— she was not scared.

Someone was there, so she would no longer be lonely. Something had changed in her unchanging world.



She was so happy about that—that she looked up at the skyscrapers shrouded by the black haze, and timidly told “him” her name.

“Who are you? My name is Kuruoka Tsubaki.”

And so, she became the distinguished first Master of the false Holy Grail War.

None could have known of their contract, forged in a dream, and— Indeed, in the outside world, the girl remained unconscious.

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Snowfield — the Kuruoka residence

“It’s about time for Faldeus to issue his declaration.”

After returning from the hospital, the Kuruokas were in high spirits, getting ready for the ceremony they would conduct that night.

“The ley lines of this area should soon be at their mightiest. Then, I will receive my Command Spells. Once I have them, everything will be in place.”

“Plus, we’ve even prepared a Noble Phantasm as a relic... and if it came down to it, we could use it as a weapon ourselves.”

“Indeed we could. If we are to call forth Shi Huangdi, we must be prepared to demonstrate a proper degree of respect.”

Their daughter was not a matter of discussion at this point.

Apparently, they were preparing to summon the most celebrated figure in Chinese history.

Unfortunately for them, all their preparations would be fruitless.

Not because their unconscious daughter had taken the Command Spells that would have been theirs.

If that were the only issue, they could well have received a different set of Command Spells. In the end, they did not receive any Command Spells— but they did receive something else.

Sensing something unusual, the husband looked at his right arm.

“Mm...?”

There was a black spot.

At first glance, it looked like a bruise. He frowned, wondering if he had bumped against something. He looked over to his wife. “Dear, what do you think this... hey!?” He was shocked.

Similar black spots appeared all over her face and her arms—and then, she collapsed to the ground, like a marionette whose strings had been cut.

“H-hey...!?”

Fate/Strange Fake 1

He tried to get to his wife, but his field of view grew mushy and indistinct. Everything split into a rainbow of colors and fell upwards.

By the time he realized that it was he who was falling, it was too late. He did not even have the strength to stand.

As he laid on the verge of unconsciousness, he understood what was happening.

Magical energy was being sucked out of his body and carried off to somewhere else.

As it was not his actual life energy that was being stolen, he would not die from this. However, he would certainly fall into a stupor.

— This can't be.

— If someone... attacks us now....

— No, what if... somebody... already....

Even as he fell into an eternal darkness, his mind was full of thoughts about the Holy Grail War. Not once did his daughter cross his mind.

And then, a few minutes later—

Both of them leaped to their feet as though nothing had happened.

Their bodies were still covered with the black spots.

“...Come to think of it, today is Tsubaki's birthday, isn't it?”

“Ah, that's right, dear! I've got to bake a cake!”

They were conspicuously unwell, and yet they spoke calmly. And about something out of the ordinary for them, at that.

Indeed, they had lost whatever personalities they once had and—

They became living dolls, who lived their lives just as their daughter wanted them to.

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She danced with “him”. She danced with “him”.

To forget the time she spent awake.

“He” danced with her. “He” danced with her. To grant her every wish.

“Yay! Thank you! Daddy! Mommy!”

“It's okay, Tsubaki. You did a good job.”

“That's right. You're our precious little treasure.”

Having received such a wonderful present, she gaily frolicked about her house.

After having her fun for a while, she smiled at the mass of black fog that stood next to her.

“Thank you for bringing my mom and dad here!”

The Servant did not even nod in reply. “He” merely continued to exist.

The sights of the real world were projected into her dreams.

Perhaps that was the power of the magical energy that had blossomed within her while she was unconscious. Given that it is impossible to affect the real world from within a dreamscape, however, magic used to project the real world into a dream-world was useless; a line of research that few magi would bother to pursue.

The Servant merely facilitated the girl’s unconscious magic.

“He” manipulated her parents in the real world so that they would behave just as she wanted them to.

Of course, “he” also absorbed their magical energy. “His” instincts compelled him to do so.

“He” could not understand human emotions. “He” merely possessed knowledge.

And indeed, because of that, and because of the great strength “he” had, “he” made the girl into the greatest and worst dark horse of the Holy Grail War.

“He” rode on the wind and the waters and the birds and the people and—

Hence, it was appropriate for “him” to be of the Rider class, for “he” had ridden “his” way to dominance over the world.

Much more importantly, however—

“He” was an embodiment of calamity, and the people gave “him” an alias that reflected that. Perhaps that spurious assignment of a personality to “him” was the most important reason that “he” was summoned as Rider.

At one time, “he” let loose the Black Death, which killed thirty million,
And at another time, under the name of the Spanish Flu, “he” killed fifty million.

“He” was the horseman who brought calamity to all. His alias:
Pestilence.

As to whether anyone would recognize what “his” alias is, or indeed, that “he” had been summoned as a Servant in the first place—

Either way, the false Holy Grail War was finally on its way to becoming a maelstrom of chaos.

Prologue VI

“Lancer”

Prologue VI: Lancer

The forest was deep—ever so deep—
He looked as if he had fallen into a bottomless bog.

—Run
 -run —run
-run -run
 -Run -Run
—RUN -run

He dashed through the forest, cutting through the night as he went. Had he really thought about why exactly he was running? Perhaps.

His actions could be described by the simple verb “flee”, but he did not have it in him to contemplate that verb and to run at the same time. We could well say that the reason he was “fleeing”—

In other words, the desire to “live”, was what impelled him to race forth.

He acted on instinct, not on reason.

He was impulsive, not rational.

He did not even know whether he ought to flee. He merely leapt forward and forward again, on and on.

How long had he been running?

With every step, his legs cried out in agony. The pain radiated throughout his body unattenuated.

But he had to keep going. His body did not want to stop, nor did his mind.

Perhaps the endorphins had already cut out. Wave upon wave of unadulterated pain washed over his body, over and over and—

————?

His ferocious instinct was strong enough to get him through even that.

Trees swept past him like a breeze, and indeed, given how he wended his way through the forest, it was like he himself had become the wind. Just when he was about to arrive at the end of the breeze—

A magically-enhanced bullet pierced through the wind.

“?!”

Before he could even feel pain, his body was overcome by shock.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

His momentum carried him to the ground. The earth mercilessly battered his body. As if it were comeuppance for the way his legs had kicked at the ground as he ran, the vast earth became as unto a weapon and walloped him.

“~~~~~ ?!”

An unvocalized scream.

Try as he might to stand up, the convulsions that overcame his body would not let him do so.

As his mind heard his body cry out in pain, his ear heard a quiet voice echo out.

“...you have caused me quite some trouble.” The speaker seemed level-headed, but beneath his calm veneer, there were clear indications that he was incensed.

The man, who seemed like a mage, lowered his heavily-ornamented revolver and carefully trod on the stomach of the collapsed escapee— and then he shoved the still-hot barrel of the revolver into the open gunshot wound.

There was a hissing sound as the escapee’s flesh was scorched. The odor of singed meat spread about the forest.

The escapee opened his mouth wider than should have been possible and exhaled moist air from the depths of his throat.

“This is absurd. Of all the things that could have happened, you received the Command Spells! What a farce!”

The escapee screamed noiselessly as he thrashed about. There certainly were chain-like markings on his body that looked like Command Spells.

“Why do you think I went to the trouble of making you? Why do you think I amplified your Magic Circuits to their utmost limit? Why do you think I have even let you live this long?”

The mage quietly shook his head and kicked the escapee—still writhing in pain—like a soccer ball.

“...To win the Holy Grail War, I must summon a being that transcends every Hero.”

He walked up to the escapee—and stomped on his face again.

“If I do not summon a being that exceeds every Hero—a being who has such power as to be called a god—I cannot hope to defeat those

Heroes who are said to be kings.” And again.

“And if it has come to this... I have no choice but to summon a being more ancient than the first Hero—one of those of Egypt who became gods.”

And he trampled him.

“But even the power of the Command Spells, combined with the latent power of this land, do not suffice to call forth a being as powerful as a god. I, too, must violate a few strictures to pull

that off.” And he crushed him.

“And you—you were to be my catalyst! A catalyst to summon a god! Why would you refuse that honor!? You have repaid my kindness with malice!”

The escapee could no longer even attempt to scream. He could see little but the darkness of the night and the ever-spreading red of his own blood.

And yet—

Even if breathing itself had become painful for him—

As he drank down the blood that spilled forth from his throat, he tried harder still to stand up.

Upon seeing the escapee that was unwilling to admit defeat, the mage sighed and—

He laid his foot on the escapee’s back and mercilessly crushed the escapee under his weight.

“Enough of this. I have any number of spares at the ready.... You will return the Command Spells to me. Then, you will die. And you will die in the way I prescribe. I will throw you into a furnace and use your remains to build myself a new experimental subject.”

He extended his right hand towards the escapee’s Command Spells.

The escapee could not care less about the Command Spells and whatnot.

He did not even know of the phrase “Holy Grail War”, let alone its meaning.

live.

He, as a living being, merely obeyed the instincts that welled up within him.

live.live.

Even then, as the end drew near, those instincts had not waned an iota.

live.live. live.

—that was all that he was aware of.

live.live. live. live live live live live. live. live. live live live live live. live.

live. live. live. live. live.

live livelivelivelive livelive livelivelivelivelive live

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—live!

Not “I don’t want to die.”

Nor was it quite “I want to live.”

It was not a desire, but rather a simple instinct,

The mere hope to “live.”

Fate/Strange Fake 1

Had he himself noticed this distinction? Or—

Then again, did he even have the means to express the notion “I don’t want to die”?

His body slowly came to rest, but—

Out of all the living beings in the Snowfield area, his will was the strongest. And with that mighty will, he screamed.

“—————”

The mage did not realize what that scream meant—and so, he did not notice:

That in that instant, the ritual had been completed.

That the escapee’s scream was his alone; that it was his own form of magic; that those were words of summoning.

That, the mage did not know.

Just a moment ago, the fifth Servant had been summoned into the ravine to the north, and—

It seemed that the false Holy Grail was in a bit of a rush to manifest the sixth Servant.

Of course, from the very outset of this Holy Grail War, with the summoning of Rider, the nature of the summoning ritual had always been rather vague.

But in any case, it was in that moment that—

The sixth Servant finally descended upon the forests of Snowfield.

A brilliant light shot through the forest, and a mighty whirlwind swayed the nearby trees.

The mage was tossed a few meters away by the strong wind. Startled, he readied his gun—but just then, he felt an enormous rush of magical energy, and so, strengthened his Magic Circuits. “Wha...”

Before his eyes, a being appeared, clad in a simple piece of cloth.

That the being was a Heroic Spirit was clearly evident from the overwhelming magical energy that poured forth from it.

At the same time, there was something unusual about it.

It looked far too plain to be a Hero.

It didn’t seem to have anything that could really be called “equipment”, and its clothing seemed rather shabby. Of course, it’s not like a Hero’s value depends on the value of his material possessions, but— even so, just what sort of Hero would be without even a single weapon?

He quietly surveyed the being.

A woman?

Based just on its face, he would call it a woman.

It had lustrous skin and soft features.

However, its chest and its hips were hidden by the loose cloth it wore. Its limbs alone extend-

ed outside the cloth, and they seemed to be quite firm and taut.

N-no, wait... that might be a man.... ...? Which is it...?

The Servant's face seemed to retain some vaguely childlike features, making it easy to interpret as either a man's face or a woman's face. Either way, its body was firm. It was tensed like a coiled spring, and could likely rocket forth in the same manner. That much was clear to the eye. Whether it was a man or a woman, its face was beautiful all the same.

Is... Is that... is that even a... a human?

The mage felt a twinge of embarrassment.

It certainly had a human face, but there was something discomforting about it. He couldn't figure out how to describe it, but there was definitely something wrong with it. Perhaps it was just too perfect. There was nothing visually out of the ordinary about it, but its entire body exuded an odd aura—kind of like a mannequin. It was as though it were a puppet, in the magical sense.

He couldn't really make out its build, perhaps because of its loose garments. He became less and less certain whether the Heroic Spirit was a man or a woman, or indeed whether it was a human or something else altogether.

Nonetheless, one thing was for sure.

That Hero was unbearably beautiful.

It was a paradoxical being, possessing both the impurity characteristic of mankind and the immaculacy inherent to nature.

Its body was like the velvety boughs that enwrapped the statue of Venus. It was as though the Heroic Spirit's form defied classification as a man or a woman; a human or a beast; a god or a demon.

With the forest behind it, the Heroic Spirit, a being of perfect harmony, let its lustrous hair flutter in the wind and—

"Are you... the Master who called for me?" it asked of the wounded escapee, sprawled on the ground before it.

Ah, what a gentle voice it was.

Its voice, too, was androgynous. In the end, the mage would never learn its true identity.

The escapee was bewildered by the sudden flash of light and burst of wind that accompanied its appearance, but when he took one glance at it, he knew.

The one who stands before me is not my enemy.

He knew that that alone was an absolute truth.

For a short while, he suppressed his urge to flee, and gazed intently at his savior.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

His eyes were ever so pure, as if he were imagining what lay within the Heroic Spirit's very soul.

It quietly knelt down as the escapee staggered to his feet, so that it could look him in the eye, and—

“_____” said it, with words that the mage could not understand.

The escapee replied to it.

“_____” it responded, again quietly.

And then, the Heroic Spirit reached out and lifted the wounded escapee into its arms.

“Thank you. We have formed a contract.”

It spoke as if to a friend of countless many years—and so, the escapee felt relief.

He was granted life. His heart swelled large with emotion.

He knew he would have to flee no more—and at long last, he could collapse.

“Im... possible... impossible! This cannot be!” His shouts echoed about the forest.

Unable to understand what he was witnessing, the mage waved his gun about.

“This is preposterous! I will not stand for this!” he yelled.

As he did, he aimed his gun.

And at the end of his barrel laid—

A silver-coated wolf, its fur stained with blood and dirt, resting in the arms of the Hero.

“You troglodyte! This just... you have no abilities to speak of! You are a mere chimera! And you are a Master!? I cannot believe this!”

The mage continued to fiercely brandish his ornamented gun, taking careful aim.

“Please lower your gun. My Master does not wish you harm,” said the Heroic Spirit, quietly.

“Wha...”

He was surprised by the politeness with which it spoke, but more importantly, he was unsettled by the contents of its statement.

“As if! What sophistry...”

“I can understand the language of his kind... and in any case, it is not difficult to surmise what you have done to my Master.”

The mage tried to scoff at the Servant, but it continued to speak, a solemn expression on its face. “And yet, my Master does not wish you harm. ...Do you understand what this means?”

With that, it turned away from the mage and began to slowly walk towards the edge of the forest.

Prologue VI: Lancer

“W-wait! Please, wait! You desire the Holy Grail, do you not!? Would you not agree that you would have a better chance of attaining the Grail if I were your master, rather than that mangy cur?”

And when the Heroic Spirit heard that, it stopped in its tracks, and—



It turned around.

That was all.

And right away—the mage let out a short yelp. With his gun still in hand, he turned his back on the Heroic Spirit and the wolf and bolted into the forest.

So awesome was the power of interdiction in the Heroic Spirit's gaze.

When it had seen the mage vanish from its sight, it expunged the harsh hue from its eyes and set forth towards the river, to heal the animal it accepted as its Master.

It could neither hear the sound of running water, nor could it see any, but—

Even so, it could sense the presence of water off yonder. And so

It kicked at the ground, gently holding the wolf to its chest, and bounded through the forest, as fast as a falcon.

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As he tore through the forest, the mage screamed internally.

“aa aAA aaaaAAA AAaaaAAAAaAAAAaaaaAaa!”

He, who had been the pursuer, was now being pursued, as he wove his way past tree after tree.

Why!

Why! Why! Why, why, WHY!?

Why was it that... that mangy cur!

Why was it not me!

Neither the Heroic Spirit nor the silver wolf was chasing him.

He knew that, and yet, he fled, with all the power his legs could muster.

He fled from the unbearable shame and unalterable reality that followed him.

After he had run a while, the mage realized that he had, at some point, exited the forest—and remembered that his atelier was close by. Finally, he was able to let his legs slow down.

And then, when he had come to a complete stop, he turned to face the forest.

“Just... what was that Heroic Spirit!?” he wondered, talking to himself.

He had refined all the magic that he and his ancestors had developed to create that chimera. Its body contained far more Magic Circuits than that of any ordinary mage. Granted, its lifespan—both as an offering and as a living being—was extremely short, but that was alright, as it was merely a catalyst to be used to summon a Heroic Spirit. And yet, it, of all things, received the Command Spells.

Even with all his experience as a mage, he could not understand how a mere beast—one that

did not even understand what the Holy Grail War was—could become a Master.

“Was that a Hero with some connection to animals...? But that was just a chimera—not even an animal. It was a meat puppet. Perhaps it was a Hero with some connection to... chimeras...?”

Given that the wolf looked rather like a dog, the mage also considered the possibility that the Servant could have been the hound of the Celts. In the end, though, he could not reconcile his image of that fierce warrior with what he saw of the Heroic Spirit.

“Tsk... well, so be it. I will just have to steal his Command Spells. No, actually, anyone’s Command Spells will do. I had best get started. If I sic the rest of my chimeras on them when they enter the town, I ought to be able to make off with that cur, at the least...”

He was already back in high spirits, with his senses back about him.

He truly was worthy of praise as a mage.

Alas, it was not praise that awaited him, but— “No, sir, we sure can’t have that.”

“? ?.. ...?!?”

“We really would prefer not to have any more sources of uncertainty. My humblest apologies.” Those cold words chilled him to the bone.

“—” The mage opened his mouth to ask who was there. From his throat came not words, but warm, red blood.

“We already have magi wandering around the city who didn’t manifest any Command Spells. It’d be a real pain if you went around causing trouble on top of the Holy Grail War. The Association and the Church are trouble enough. We can’t afford to make an enemy of the militia, you see. They are public servants, after all.”

Upon hearing him speak, the mage realized that the man standing before him was a man who once was a disciple of the puppeteer Rohngall—a man of the Association by the name of Faldeus.

Of course, more important to the mage than Faldeus’s affiliations was the question of how to stop his neck from spewing blood.

“Oh, no, don’t bother. Just listen as you are. I have no particular desire to answer your questions, nor do I plan to let you live. As such, I have taken the liberty of slitting your throat.”

Faldeus slowly twirled a Swiss Army Knife in his hand. Drop after drop of red dripped from it. It was not a ritual weapon, of the sort typically used by magi, but rather, an ordinary knife, of the sort one might find in a typical outdoor recreation store.

“Tut-tut. Even if you weren’t expecting this to happen, you shouldn’t fall victim to an unenchanted knife. Your ancestors must be weeping.”

“ ----.----- .” A wheezing sound came from the mage’s throat, but he was unable to draw breath.

He was rapidly losing consciousness

“...come to think if it, who are you, anyway? Eh, whatever. Not like you can answer me anyway,” said Faldeus.

As Faldeus looked down on the mage, with his guard up as always, he slowly waved his right hand.

The mage felt a shock.

And that was the end. The mage’s consciousness left him, never to return.

When Faldeus waved his hand, innumerable many bullets flew through the air and rent the mage’s body.

Faced with that gory sight, Faldeus remained emotionless.

Perhaps because he could not even imagine the possibility that a stray bullet would hit him, he did not even breathe harder as the bullets raced by in front of him.

Just like when he had Rohngall’s puppet destroyed, the gunshots were muffled. A leaden force sashayed through what had been the mage’s body.

When about half of the mage was gone, Faldeus waved his hand again.

In less than a second, the hailstorm of bullets ceased. Faldeus sat down on a nearby boulder. His expression finally softened somewhat.

“I do beg your pardon. I’m something of a chatterbox, you see. I never know when I’m going to leak confidential information, so I can’t really have a good conversation unless I’m talking to a corpse,” he courteously said to the lump of flesh, which, of course, could not hear, let alone understand him.

“I must say, I’m a bit concerned about what the Kuruokas summoned.... And, to be honest, you’ve gone and made a huge mess yourself. I just had a look through your atelier, and... well, I’m astonished that you would try to summon something on the level of a god. That’s a foul against the system. Didn’t you know that? Wars have rules too.” Faldeus spoke fluidly and at length, now that he was speaking to a corpse. His former reticence had vanished altogether.

“Even if this whole business is some sort of test for us, we really do need you folks to have a bit of self-control.”

Unlike when he had Rohngall’s puppet destroyed, he did not have an army of underlings surrounding him. Also, he was speaking at a real corpse, not a mere puppet.

“I had a look at the footage we took in the forest... And, well, it’s amazing that he—well, maybe her, so why don’t we go with ‘it’? ...In any case, it’s amazing that it could be summoned as a Heroic Spirit. If you had managed to summon it as Berserker, you very well might have gained the power of a god that you so desired.”

It seemed that Faldeus truly was surprised by what he saw, as evidenced by his emotional

state.

Perhaps it was a pleasant surprise for him. A smile crept over his face.

“Well, the system shouldn’t allow for that sort of thing, but seeing as how there’re anomalous happenings everywhere, I wouldn’t put too much faith in that. By Jove, someone might have even summoned something positively unspeakable in a secret hideout somewhere. Then again, that thing that your pet summoned is quite unspeakable itself.” Faldeus gesticulated as he spoke, as if he were talking to an old friend. With a corpse on the ground before him, he spoke to himself, so as to reinforce his own understanding of the situation. “To begin with, it was never so much a Hero...

“As it was a Noble Phantasm of the gods themselves.”

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Of course, that Hero had the body of a human.

However, it was not human.

Long, long ago, the gods fashioned a doll from clay and sent it to the earth to appear within a forest. That doll was neither male nor female; rather, it was phantasmal.

It lacked human knowledge, and so, it gamboled about the forest like a beast.

However, it had power that surpassed human understanding. When it was enraged, it was said to be mightier than even the Hero who ruled a certain kingdom at the time.

That king laughed at the doll with contempt. “Nary can my might be compared to that of a beast,” said he, refusing even to lay eyes upon it.

The king believed his power to be supreme; that there could not be a being stronger than he. Thus, the king laughed off rumors of the beast.

When that beast met a certain celebrated hierodule, however, their fates changed forever.

When that genderless mass of clay met that woman whose beauty transcended gender, it fell in love at first sight.

As they spent six days and seven nights together, sharing meals and sharing a bed, the clay doll slowly assumed a human form, as if to imitate that beautiful prostitute.

The clay beast who was ignorant of mankind attempted to assume that prostitute’s beauty.

When it made that paradoxical beauty its own, the clay doll lost much of its strength. In exchange, it gained human wisdom and reason.

Though it had lost much of its divinity—

Its power still far exceeded that of man.

And then, the doll, now endowed with the body and the wisdom of a human, stood before that mighty king.

They fought a battle that shook the heavens and the earth, and once the battle was over, each acknowledged the other's strength.

The golden king and the clay doll.

Surely, there could be no beings further apart than they. Nonetheless, each became the other's one and only friend. They embarked on countless many adventures, sharing their pain and their pleasure with one another.

And then, millennia after those golden-and-earthen days—

Their fates changed forever again.

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At a stream perhaps ten kilometers distant, the Heroic Spirit cursorily treated the wounds of the silver wolf—its Master—and laid him down to rest.

„I must say... I am relieved. I was worried that the whole world had been buried like Uruk, but it seems the world is as beautiful as ever.”

It looked at the vast wilderness before it. Using the language of beasts, it described the world to its Master, as it lay at its Master's side.

However, its Master had already fallen into a deep sleep, and did not reply.

Laughing softly, it sat down, and gave itself over to the sound of the flowing water, when—

Suddenly, it turned to look northwards.

Using its class ability, Presence Detection —it detected a presence far, far to the north. A very familiar presence.

Indeed, it detected the presence right as the golden-armored Heroic Spirit walked out of the cave.

“Could it be—”

Unable at first to believe what fate had wrought, it opened its eyes wide and—

“...is it you?”

It was sure that the presence it sensed to the north was none other than the king it knew. It slowly stood up.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

A short silence.

In that while, just what went through its mind?

Bewilderment.

Consternation.

And finally—overwhelming joy.

Not only did fate bring them both to the Holy Grail War, but it also afforded them another opportunity to engage in mortal combat.

But what of that?

Even if it took his head, and he took its heart, what of it?

The ties that bound them would not fray from a duel or two.

Nay, even if they slew one another a thousand times over, they would hold strong.

“Haha...”

It let a very natural smile appear on its face. It opened its arms wide and—

“What fun it would be... to continue with the duel we fought on that plaza.”

With its arms outstretched, it sang in a mighty voice, from the very core of its being.

It was a gentle voice.

The Hero Enkidu.

Its song shook the very earth, becoming like a beautiful undulation of the land that reached every part of the Snowfield area.

That was evidence that all the Servants had assembled—

And it was also a signal to commence battle.

All the magi and Heroic Spirits had convened on this false stage.

They sought to dance upon it—despite knowing that this Holy Grail War was a false one.

Truth and falsehood were secondary to their desires. They fought not for the Holy Grail, but for their convictions—

It was a Holy Grail War for them alone.

That was the spark that began the war.

Extra

“Observer. Or, Character Creation”

Extra

“Observer. Or, Character Creation”

The space was a completed world.

Jet black with points of light.

In the center of a room in the wide, perfect sphere dyed in the color of the night sky, there floated a wooden chair.

Based on its appearance alone, it would be enough to call the chair extravagant, but its wood gave it a refined hue, and one would not think it a repulsive gaud of the elite. Rather, just by existing here, it imbued the space around it with a conspicuous gravity.

If an unrefined person sat in the chair, that person would likely be consumed by the weight of the chair’s existence and hidden from surrounding view. Such was the significance of the chair.

The space had been prepared for the sole purpose of exhibiting the chair.

A man exuding a solemnity that outweighed that of the chair leaned back in it, emitting a loud creak.

“Hm...”

If one were to draw a reduced map of the universe based on this room, the man sitting in the chair would be at its center, emitting an air surely befitting its master.

His external appearance would probably place his age in the 50s or 60s.

One could sense the trials of his life in the wrinkles etched deeply on his face, but his eyes remained brimming with brilliance, such as one might see in someone ten years his junior.

“This axis is wrong... these lines will be annihilated too...”

When the man slipped his finger into the sky, the heavenly bodies displayed on the surrounding walls began to revolve.

“Oh, this cut-off isn’t so... no, it’s the worst. That damned giant spider will wake up. It’s a century too early to face that.”

Then, as if to match his words, the pages in the book hovering in front of the man turned with a flutter, inscribing multifarious information in real-time.

The thickness of the book was about that of a standard encyclopedia.

Regardless, as the man guided his finger through the air, thousands— tens of thousands of pages were born and erased.

After continuing this activity again and again, the old man muttered as if in boredom.

“As I thought, no matter how this is resolved, it doesn’t result in a satisfactory outcome for the Association. Having said that, there isn’t enough reason for my interventions. Yes, it’s a com-

plete stalemate.”

The man who seemed to be talking to himself suddenly asked the space behind him for an opinion.

“What do you think? It’s about time you said hello. That communication device there is working fine.”

At that, the space replied,

“How rude of me. It seems you’ve noticed.”

There was a small wooden table of similar design to the chair. Atop it sat a telephone.

It had the shape of a very old telephone, the kind that looked like a table lamp at first glance. But instead of a light bulb, there was a conical speaker. Mounted on a thin post was a microphone. A dial was affixed to the base of the device.

It was a telephone you would only find in movies, museums, or antique shops, save for one difference. Unlike the black color of most antique telephones, this one was a beautiful blue color that evoked sapphire. At a glance, one could only think that it had been crafted from an enormous precious gem.

As for the question of how long the telephone had been there, there shouldn’t have been anything in that space until several minutes prior. But, the telephone was wonderfully integrated with the harmony of the room, as if it had always existed there.

Indeed, addressing the phone had confirmed the fact of its existence, as if the history of the room had been rewritten.

“With a little more time, I had planned to make the phone’s bell ring.”

A youthful-sounding voice resounded from the telephone’s speaker.

It seemed as if the phone was speaking according to its own will.

“Do I strike you as an old man who talks to himself?”

“Did you ask me that because you knew it was me?”

“Where do you think we are? I can count the number of people who can get inside.”

Rolling his shoulders, the old man glanced at the blue telephone.

“So, what business do you have here? If you want to have tea, come back later. Unfortunately, I’m wrapped up in some troublesome work.”

“Yeah, I’m actually here because of that.”

“What?”

“If you’re going to choose someone to observe the incident at Snowfield, don’t pick from the magi. You should select a world on the basis of being an intruder.

With that, the telephone’s dial slowly began to turn, returning to its starting point at certain intervals before turning again.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

At the same time, the heavenly bodies revolving around the room — and the book that the old man was reading — began turning faster than they had been before.

Inscribed on the pages was the face of a human, and that person's information.

At times, it was male. At times, it was female.

At times, it was elderly. At times, it was a child.

At times, it was musclebound. At times, it was obese.

At times, it was a saint. At times, it was a vicious murderer.

At times, it was a magus. At times, it was a priest.

Flipping between countless qualities such as race, gender, age, body type, clothing, personality, and occupation, the book's pages turned with incredible momentum.

"You're quite confident in the turning of the planets."

"The trajectory to the future is like a labyrinth. It's my specialty."

Someone passing by the two at this moment would likely have found it a bizarre conversation.

"Of course, unlike my labyrinth, the destination one makes depends upon the person."

The pages kept turning at a high speed, and the displayed faces smoothly blended into each other.

As if he was watching a scene from times past, the old man sat back and watched as the telephone continued to turn its own dial.

Then, after some time, the turning of the pages slowed.

Inscribed on one page was an Eastern person.

"Next is to... yes, she needs some glasses."

The pages turned delicately. A thin-framed pair of glasses appeared on the person's face.

"...Is that important?"

"Who knows? I'm just back-calculating from the result I arrived at. Whether or not it has any meaning at all is something we can consider later."

"Hmph."

As he looked at the information on the final page, the old man spoke to the telephone behind him.

"Still, you've suddenly involved yourself with the world. If you're that bored, just visit the town yourself. Shouldn't there be a cafe that caters to readers? You can kill plenty of time there."

"No... this isn't exactly killing time. I'm rather involved with the incident this time."

"...I see. It's something that one has thought of."

The old man immediately understood the meaning behind the telephone's words, and recalled someone's face. He took a deep sigh— and then his lips twisted into a smile.

“So you have a bit of a plan... all the more reason you can’t intervene. It’s the sort of fool that rejoices as more intruders are involved. Let the Holy Grail War this time be followed through by an outsider.”

“Yeah, you’re right. If you handled this poorly, it would confirm the world.”

It was certainly a bizarre conversation that could only happen between these two. Then, the person behind the telephone — or possibly, the telephone itself — looked at the person now described in the open book, and spoke in a cheerful voice.

“Her universe is a pseudepigraphon, or perhaps it’s the opposite. Let’s hope for the best and watch over her.”

The book was opened to a picture of a young girl.

It was an apparently Eastern girl in her late teens to early twenties, with dyed blonde hair.

Below her portrait was a name beginning with the letter A.

And then, with her as the center—

Here and now, the curtain would rise on a Holy Grail War smeared with falsehood and vanity.

Now... it’s time to spur on the fakes.

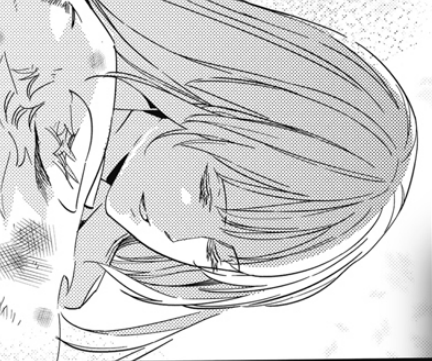


Fate/strange Fake

フレイト/ストレンジ フレイク

Come...

It's time to exterminate the fake.



Chapter 1

“The War Begins”

Chapter 1

The War Begins

What sort of being was Gilgamesh?

Tiné Chelc's information on him prior to his summoning was cursory, at best.

However, with just that sliver of knowledge, she had been determined to stake her destiny, and the obsession she inherited from her ancestors, on this Heroic Spirit.

Gilgamesh, King of Heroes.

Eons ago, in what was later called Mesopotamia, there reigned a great king who would become the hero of the land. During the early days of an age in which the gods still lived, and people had greater power as individuals than they do now, this hero, born of a union between man and god, ruled over the fortress-city Uruk.

He was known as both a despot who destroyed his country, and as a king who stood on the precipice of history and brought the land into a new age. Regardless of what end he met, the fact remained that Uruk flourished as a nation of magnificent splendor under the rule of Gilgamesh. His vault was said to contain all of the works of gods and men, and it was rumored that they were the original versions of all Noble Phantasms used by heroes of later ages.

In the past, this Heroic Spirit, who possessed great divinity, was apparently summoned in the Holy Grail Wars of a land known as Japan. It was said that Gilgamesh's power surpassed that of many other heroes, and that he had emerged as the victor.

From what Tiné had heard, he was a man of many skills and was competent in all areas, but more importantly his combat style was so overwhelming that it gave everyone else pause. The stories about raising the fortress-city and collecting countless treasures out of greed had caught her attention.

Once Tiné committed herself into this Holy Grail War, she was prepared to cast aside her integrity. Her side needed transcendent power in order to take back their land from the infringement of the greedy. In other words, she needed to be even greedier than the usurpers—

That was how Tiné had been raised.

So, she knew she had to be ruthless. If Gilgamesh was a tyrant who would trample on an enemy already laid low just to eliminate them, so be it.

It didn't matter how much she tainted her honor.

Her people would chase the violators out of their land, and cleanse it in its entirety.

To fulfill the duty she had inherited from her ancestors, Tiné intended to abandon her girl-

ish heart and offer her entire self to the powerful despot.

She wasn't afraid of death. What Tiné truly feared was nothing other than the continued rape of her ancestral homeland at the hands of the magi outsiders.

However, she had miscalculated.

She wasn't wrong about Gilgamesh's quality as a hero.

Tiné, who lived in the modern era, simply did not understand the true significance of a hero who had been alive in an age when gods freely mixed with humans. It didn't matter whether he was a tyrannical or a benevolent king.

She had utterly underestimated the magnitude of his power. Tiné had no inkling of the overwhelming might that the golden-armored Heroic Spirit was said to have displayed during previous Holy Grail Wars.

However, to the Heroic Spirit Gilgamesh, these conflicts were dull affairs mired in conceit and foolishness, save for a brief moment.

So, what sort of being was Gilgamesh?

Right after Tiné swore her loyalty to him, she glimpsed a hint of the truth.

He was a man with the royal disposition of a king, and the heroic soul of a champion. When the garment that the King of Heroes had graced her with was torn away, she saw a torrent of pure power.

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Night — Northern Snowfield — Wide Valley

"You are but a child, so act like one. While you are still ignorant in the ways of the world, simply rejoice in the brilliance of my kingship."

"I shall endeavor to do so."

When Tiné lowered her head at Gilgamesh's words, it happened.

"...?"

An enormous flow of mystic energy blanketed the surrounding space and converged at a point beside Tiné.

"!?"

It was more than just energy.

The purest magical element she had ever seen in her life — no, it even had a divine aura to it — coalesced in the King of Heroes' right hand, and materialized in the form of a dagger.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

But, the object had too bizarre a silhouette to be called a simple dagger. It looked very similar to Gilgamesh's summoning catalyst used by the magus that Tiné had eliminated earlier.

"A key... sword?" Tiné murmured without thinking.

Gilgamesh haughtily replied, "Do not speak of this in the same terms as the key in the hands of that clown."

Grasping the key-sword, Gilgamesh turned its tip skyward.

"This is something like a contract I bound myself, given form."

His tone seemed bored, but his expression contained a hint of joy.

"Pay attention, Tiné. And show me your proof."

"...?"

Before Tiné, whose head was bowed, it opened.

The energy flowing from the key-sword surged into all of the space around it, and opened a portal in the world itself.

Tiné's black-clad allies were sent into a clamor, but the voices of the crowd, which amounted to hundreds of people, were silenced by the trembling of space.

The dimensions themselves seemed to be shaking, and only Gilgamesh's voice clearly reached Tiné's ears.

"Know this — my subjects would never be shocked by a mere children's game."

While he spoke, the distortion in space converged on a single point.

A single sword emerged from the distortion in front of Gilgamesh. It was nothing like the earlier key-sword, but it was certainly no normal weapon. The sword had a strangely shaped blade.

As if enjoying himself, Gilgamesh spoke directly to the sword.

"O Ea. It may be unpleasant to wake from your slumber, but I shall soon provide you with a feast."

An instant later, the King of Heroes moved.

"No, you won't be bored. No one will."

He was graceful in every gesture, and arrogant in all respects.

Then, taking a stride filled with unconcealable jubilation, Gilgamesh's figure suddenly vanished from sight.

With a single step, he had gone somewhere else.

That was all he did, but even to Tiné who was learned in magic, Gilgamesh's gesture was imbued with an overwhelming fire she had never experienced before, and perhaps might never

again.

Leaving a Master's side was an unthinkable act for a Servant to commit. The workings of the Holy Grail War were engraved in the brains of all Servants at the time of their summoning. Gilgamesh couldn't have been unaware of the risks of leaving his Master alone.

Yet, Tiné, stunned by the heat of the moment, could find no fault with his actions.

She had to burn everything that happened from now on into her memory. This was the premonition Tiné felt as she was flooded with Gilgamesh's power.

The feeling that welled up in the heart of the young girl, who was supposed to have abandoned all emotion, was a fear of the unknown. Or perhaps...

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Seconds Earlier — Western Snowfield — Large Forest

"Master, I'd like you to wait here... just for a little while."

Enkidu brushed the cheek of the silver wolf, who looked at him with anxious eyes. Then, he knelt on one knee before his Master, and softly splayed his fingers in the earth.

"It will be all right."

As Enkidu smiled, the surrounding trees began to rustle.

"The forest will protect you."

They were suddenly concealed from the sky by a frantic movement of branches and leaves, and powerful mystic energy began to flow into the earth. It was as if the forest had a will completely of its own, and deliberately formed a natural magical barrier.

"I have to go. If I meet him here, the forest would be killed, and I'd have no way to protect you. Can you forgive me?"

"-----"

Enkidu hugged the silver wolf as it gave a feeble howl.

"Thank you, Master. As long as life beats within this breast of mine, I swear to return to you."

At the same time that Gilgamesh had disappeared from the company of Tiné and her allies, Enkidu also made a single stride on the earth.

He was as modest as the wind, and as pious as a spring. Having said that, the joy expressed in Enkidu's powerful footsteps was no less than that of the King of Heroes.

"...This is bad. Let's leave the forest."

Faldeus, sensing an anomaly, ordered his men to retreat over the radio.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

“What’s going on?”

“The flow of mana has changed. It is likely that the woods are now under its control.”

As he said this, Faldeus felt an enormous power streaming through the forest. Silently, without harming the woods, it moved as if gliding upon the earth. One could even call it the wind.

In awe of the presence of this Heroic Spirit that had become one with the forest, Faldeus confirmed its bearing, and then issued orders to his subordinates.

“...As you withdraw, stay as far away from the desert as possible. We’ll deploy UAVs and familiars in that area.”

Then, in the skies high above Snowfield, a great force seemed to disrupt the atmosphere, and something of equally monumental power passed through.

Faldeus felt this flow of power several seconds after he issued the order to retreat.

“Could it be?”

Was something happening there?

After calculating the possibilities, Faldeus came to a solution, and rejected it..

Or rather, he hoped that it wasn’t true.

“We haven’t even begun to grasp their power... do they intend to start already?”

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In the city — a cheap motel

In a cheap motel that was old even by midtown standards, Flat woke up, though he had been sleeping soundly just a moment ago. The motel was situated along a highway a short distance from the center of town.

As the young man rubbed his eyes and rose, his Servant Jack spoke.

“What’s wrong, Master? Are you having trouble sleeping? If you need to use the toilet, just say so. I will turn into spirit form and wait here.”

“...I just noticed, but being spoken to like this right after I wake up reminds me of those cartoon character alarm clocks.”

Flat was speaking to his left wrist.

On that wrist was a steampunk-styled antique wristwatch, and Jack’s voice came from it.

“Normally I would already be in spirit form, but you’re the one that said ‘it’d be awesome if I looked like a spy,’ so here we are.”

Jack was currently Flat's personal wristwatch.

After leaving the park, Flat decided to test Jack's power of "transforming into anything," making him turn into everything from people to plants and animals, and then eventually inanimate objects.

At first, he thought, "there's no way Jack the Ripper's true identity was an inanimate object." But according to Jack, there were apparently many romance novels in which "Jack the Ripper was actually a person possessed by a cursed item," and then he had shown Flat how he could transform into a surprising variety of objects.

After testing out a wristwatch transformation, Flat took a liking to its design, and the topic had turned to planning for his personal safety by wearing it regularly.

He always wore the watch except when he was showering or on the toilet, and the two initially communicated via telepathy until Flat uttered something very unlike a magus:

"This is kind of tiring. It's more fun to talk normally."

And so they spoke out loud when no one was watching.

Flat got off the bed, and checked Jack's time against that of the motel room's clock.

"That's amazing, though. There's no difference at all."

"Well, let it be said that punctuality is a quality of the English gentleman. At least, that would be true if I actually was a gentleman."

"So even gentlemen can be serial killers, huh?"

"....."

After unmindfully trampling on Jack's feelings, Flat went to the bathroom, stoppered the sink, and began to fill it with water.

"What are you doing?"

Flat wet his fingers while answering Heroic Spirit Wristwatch's question.

"Don't you feel anything?"

"Mrgh..."

While Jack choked on his words, the young Master placed his finger on the bathroom mirror and started drawing a simple magic circle.

"Two conspicuous sources of magical noise, heading southward."

At that, Jack spoke in a somewhat embarrassed tone.

"I'm not proud of it, but basically, my abilities as a magus are poor. They would increase if I were to take the form of a mage, but attempting to sense abnormalities of mana while in this form is an impossible task."

"Oh, so if you turned into a radar dish, your sensing powers might go up!"

Fate/Strange Fake 1

“...Are you really a magus from the Clock Tower?”

Ignoring Jack’s doubts, Flat casually kept moving his finger until he completed the magic circle. Then, he spoke some incantation at the mirror... and the water in the sink changed.

There were a series of ripples on the water’s surface, and then it displayed some kind of vision. Seeing an image of a desert in the water, the wristwatch’s hands ticked.

“What is this?”

“Some people are using familiars to monitor the desert, so I’m just taking a little peek,” Flat replied nonchalantly.

“...What?”

“If I sent a familiar out now, it wouldn’t make it in time,” Flat explained offhand.

Although Jack wasn’t a specialist in magic, he had some essential knowledge transmitted from the Holy Grail system.

From that knowledge, Jack understood that “taking a peek at someone else’s familiar” was no trivial feat.

It would make sense if Flat was a neophyte in magic, but coming to the Holy Grail War as a tourist, or interfering in the spells of a Master magus that was actually fighting in the war, was something no sane person would do.

And if it were so easy, would it not mean the collapse of this entire system that ran on familiars?

As doubts swirled in his head, Jack spoke.

“Can you really do something like that? No, I mean, even if it were possible... isn’t it risky? If they trace it, our location could be compromised.”

“Mmm, I did it in a way that I wouldn’t be found out... though I can’t say for sure that we won’t be detected. The Professor wouldn’t be able to, but he’d probably have a hunch and hunt me down later... oh, but someone of Luvia-chan’s level might just cause an energy backflow and blow up this entire motel...”

Murmuring some rather unsettling things, the young man refocused and kept talking.

“Well, if they do find us out, I’ll just apologize as hard as I can!”

An icy wind buffeted Jack’s heart, and he muttered to himself as Flat laughed innocently.

It wasn’t completely accurate, but it was still a sentence that, just a bit, described the essence of his Master.

“I’m terrified that you’ll still be saying such things after you’ve killed someone.”

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Southern Snowfield — Desert Region

There was an expansive desert to the south of the city.

It wasn't as large as the deserts of Colorado or Arizona, but it continued as far as the eye could see from the city, and someone who wandered in carelessly could easily be stranded.

In the middle of this desert, they faced each other.

From here, the forest and the city were no longer visible, and there was nothing but sandy ground, save for some sparse desert-adapted flora.

The Heroic Spirit of the spear, Enkidu, had arrived earlier, and was quietly gazing at the night sky.

There, a golden figure hovered in the air, as if to smother the countless twinkling stars. The Heroic Spirit of the bow was clad in golden armor, and he gripped something in his hand.

Enkidu knew exactly what was in the floating man's hand.

He also knew that the man was floating thanks to the power of a special Noble Phantasm.

And, of course, he knew who the man was.

Heaven and Earth.

The distance between the two was roughly 120 meters.

The Heroic Spirits met each other's eyes.

One set of eyes looked down upon the ground, while the other stared into the night sky. But each gaze was neither condescending nor reverent to the other.

Once they had identified each other, they exchanged no words.

But an instant later, both of their lips curled at exactly the same time... and they laughed.

They laughed, as if to express that everything was now enough.

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Meanwhile — Somewhere in urban Snowfield — Rooftop

The nameless Assassin stood on the rooftop of the tallest building of a section of the city, the casino hotel "Crystal Hill."

She was there to get the lay of the land, and to feel out the presence of those people involved with the Holy Grail War.

It was a conspicuous move, but if someone came to target her, that would just speed things up. She was perched on that rooftop in a tactlessly straightforward tactic, observing the city—

Fate/Strange Fake 1

Until something caught her attention.

It was south of the city. There was only desert on the horizon.

“...”

But the zealot did not avert her eyes, intently scowling at the valley between Heaven and Earth.

“Oh... has the party begun?”

Observing Assassin from the rooftop of a different building, the bloodsucking magus, Jester, also sensed the anomaly.

His powers of perception were not especially strong. Nonetheless, a tingle ran up his spine as he sensed the presence of... something.

Perhaps it was the instinct of someone who had lived so long on the margin between life and death.

Right now, somewhere in that desert, something was happening.

Noting this premonition of a sense other than that of magical perception, he smiled a dastardly grin and sneered.

“This war will be our wedding aisle. Do try to show us some fireworks.”

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Snowfield — Desert Region

After taking the time to exchange a smile, Gilgamesh moved.

The strange sword in his hand — the Sword of Rupture, Ea — activated, and unleashed its true form as a Noble Phantasm.

Noble Phantasms.

They were possessed by Heroic Spirits, and made up a part of their concept as heroes.

Some were weapons wielded by heroes throughout their lives. Some were parts of a hero's body. Some could be considered the soul of the hero itself, a spatial artifact that painted over reality. Noble Phantasms came in countless forms, and they varied from hero to hero.

To Gilgamesh, who had obtained every treasure there was, mediocre Noble Phantasms were mere trinkets to be tossed into his vault. But this sword was one of the few exceptions that was especially prized among the Noble Phantasms that Gilgamesh owned.

Yet, the sword bore no inscription.

Though it was called Ea, this was merely a nickname of convenience he had given it.

In fact, it might not even be a sword at all.

After all, this was something that had existed long before swords and spears had appeared in history.

It hailed from an era more ancient than humans, older than even the planet itself.

It was a rarity among rarities, a pure manifestation of the power wielded by gods to enact Genesis.

It was the beginning of all on this planet. It was that which clove apart Heaven and Earth.

It rent the void and created the sky, then pierced the sky and returned it to the void.

This power symbolized the Beginning and the End, and only Gilgamesh, who inherited the essence of the gods, was permitted to wield it.

Therefore, when Gilgamesh swung the sword with all his might, it was defined as...

Anti-world Noble Phantasm.

Offensive Noble Phantasms were classified into tiers such as anti-personnel, anti-army, anti-fortress, and so forth.

In many cases, an anti-personnel Noble Phantasm was more appropriate to a one-on-one battle between Heroic Spirits than an anti-army or anti-fortress Noble Phantasm. But when it came to the sheer power of an anti-world Noble Phantasm, considerations such as compatibility and applicability went out the window.

It was absolute power — the power to destroy the World itself.

Regardless of whether the opponent was an individual or a group, it simply broke down the world they existed in.

Such was the attack which Gilgamesh unleashed with all of his strength.

Against a single Heroic Spirit, Gilgamesh attacked without hesitation. This was neither play nor negligence. The King of Heroes discarded his usual arrogance and put everything he had into a single attack.

On the ground stood the Heroic Spirit Enkidu.

This attack was a message to his oldest, only friend. It was a song of pure joy for their reunion, conveying everything he felt as a king, as a hero, and as the man Gilgamesh.

“O Ea, sing to thy heart’s content.”

Fate/Strange Fake 1

Gilgamesh spoke these words not to the Heroic Spirit below him, but to the sword in his hand.

As if in response, the cylindrical sword twisted the air while spinning like a tunneling drill. The whirlwind grew and drew in even more air, and a small tornado formed.

The two cyclones combined and created an even greater distortion in the air — all of this was drawn and compressed in the sword.

The layers of wind grew even denser and exceeded the physical laws, quickly turning into a lethal weapon that ripped apart all of Creation, and began condensing into a fissure in space itself.

Sound and light converged in the distortion, and silence and darkness encircled the sword. As if to excite the howls of the seemingly living weapon, Gilgamesh gripped it even more strongly, and swung it down at his long-lost friend without hesitation—

“ENUMA ELISH!!”

Star of Genesis — Separate Heaven and Earth

The distortion ruptured.

The entire universe that had been compressed beyond limit focused around Ea, and was released by its wielder’s slash. The resulting pressure wave sundered the nearby space. The World itself was sucked up by the chasm of the Void, and turned inside out.

Who would believe that this scene was caused by the swing of a sword?

The Void emerged from the chasm, rupturing space further. The World eroded, giving way to countless fissures in reality.

The sands cracked like clay. The sky and clouds were shredded like so much paper.

It was a hellish landscape, as if a painting of the desert had been thrown into a blender.

The “slash” of the sword twisted and tore the planet, sending a wave of destruction at the Heroic Spirit standing on the ground.

Then, Enkidu...

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Police Station

Chief of Police Orlando Reeve — acolyte magus that he was — sensed the swirling auras south of the city.

“Even within town, we are detecting countless, minute energy sources. It is likely that the magi who have infiltrated Snowfield have deployed familiars to the desert.”

Orlando was quiet for a few seconds after hearing his aide’s report. The police chief silently looked out the window.

Earlier, he had finally received news that six Servants had been gathered.

However, he hadn’t predicted that the situation would accelerate this quickly.

He suspected it to be a plot of Faldeus and that meddling old fool, but there was no point in investigating it now.

Far away, there was a power so terrible as to make him tremble.

Even if the clash was happening tens of kilometers away, it could no longer be ignored as someone else’s problem.

It was a wave of power just enough to cause slight discomfort, but every hair on Orlando’s body stood on end.

What he felt now was very similar to witnessing an F5 tornado looming down on his hometown as a child.

Fighting down turbulent, gut-wrenching emotions, Orlando calmly commanded his subordinate.

“...Call the entire field team. I’m going to brief them.”

There was probably no need to assemble them here. Until several minutes ago he had actually been thinking that individual comms would have been enough.

But, after feeling this massive flow of mana, he reconsidered. It was time for a slight change of plans.

At this point, it was no longer possible to think of the Holy Grail War as “a war between magi.”

Now, there was all the more reason to speak to the field team, face to face. He had to tell them that the flag of justice was already flying behind them, as they stepped into this foreign battlefield.

Orlando wasn’t so naive as to think that this war could be won with complacency. In a truly pressing battle, that mindset could be the difference between life and death.

It was all or nothing.

The chief felt space itself warp in the desert, and reaffirmed his conviction.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

Justice.

They had to trust that the power of that word would protect them. The enemy was just that formidable.

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Desert Region

The blow that declared the start of the False Holy Grail War could well have been the final attack that ended a Holy Grail War.

Many Heroic Spirits would not even warrant the use of Ea.

Most Heroic Spirits whom the King deemed worthy to wield his sword against would be awed at its power, yet challenge the King anyway.

Heroes that witnessed the power of Genesis would feel a variety of emotions.

Resignation, determination, terror, fear, horror, hatred, or perhaps joy.

But there was only one Heroic Spirit who would smile with nostalgia in the face of hell on Earth, the amalgamation of Death and the Void.

Ah, yes.

While a vast power trampled Heaven and Earth and smashed the World on its path toward him, Enkidu smiled with an expression of deep relief.

It was an attack devoid of deceit or subterfuge.

Though it lacked the sheer magnitude it had during the Age of Gods, the nature of his power was exactly as it had been.

“—I’m happy, Gil.

...So happy that I can test my powers against yours like this again...”

There was no one more human than him, though he hated humans — no one more divine, though he denied the gods.

The King of Heroes, who stood upon the apex of Creation, was fighting him seriously as an opponent.

In that case, Enkidu could only respond in kind.

As he thought this, the Heroic Spirit turned with a gentle motion.

“Adjusted for this era... I think it’d be something like this.”

The Void shattered the earth as it made its way towards him. The Heroic Spirit smiled, and smiled, and smiled—

“I’ll fight with everything I have too, Gil.”

Then, the world went into flux.

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Northern Snowfield — Wide Valley

“What on Earth...?”

Tiné Chelc was confused.

She had sent her condor familiar after the Heroic Spirit, but it couldn’t keep up at all.

But she knew immediately that something was happening, based on the earth tremors coming from the south.

Before Gilgamesh departed, he had said, “This battle has become worthy of my true might.” In other words, the source of the earth-shaking howling was probably her Servant, who had gone off to fight seriously.

An enormous quantity of Od — her body’s internal mystic energy — was flowing away.

The power supply to a contracted Servant was provided by the Holy Grail established in the land and the Master’s own energy.

While she was on this land, Tiné could draw upon the mana gushing from its leylines and convert it to Od as she pleased, but now she felt as if her body would be sucked dry if she lost her focus. Tiné’s magic circuits jarred as she converted energy at a shocking rate.

Still, the girl let no discomfort show on her face, and bore the burden. She would show no weakness in front of the comrades who had placed their faith in her.

Besides, if she faltered at a trifle such as this, she would be unworthy to be a subject of the King, as Gilgamesh had said.

As these thoughts went through her head, Tiné embraced a single conviction.

There was a Noble Phantasm that destroyed the World itself.

Gilgamesh had shut off the shared perception and telepathy that linked them as master and familiar. So, Tiné didn’t know what was actually happening at the battleground, but this energy flow told her enough.

Tiné was convinced that no Servant could clash with this much power and hope to survive.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

Should she rejoice in the removal of a chess piece so early in the game? Or should she lament tipping their hand to the other Master camps? As the girl doubted herself, something happened that bewildered her even further.

“...?”

Because Tiné used a unique brand of magic that shared energy with the earth, she felt it even at this distance.

“Impossible!”

Enough power was flowing to the desert to oppose Gilgamesh. And it wasn't from the ley-lines.

It was as if the planet itself had come into that location, and funneled a gigantic amount of mana into it.

It was enough to delude one into thinking that Gaia, the Counter Force of the planet, was opposing Gilgamesh's power to destroy the World.

Then, she understood.

Right now, the Heroic Spirit fighting Gilgamesh in the southern desert was at least as powerful as he was. It was a being outside the rules of the game.

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Desert Region

Enkidu's manifestation as a Lancer was probably due to his Noble Phantasm.

However, it was not quite accurate to call it a Noble Phantasm.

It was a Chisel to tie the bond between gods and men. This was Enkidu's true nature.

According to one tale, in an attempt to cling to their power, the gods had placed Gilgamesh upon the earth as a chisel to ensure that humans would continue to worship the gods as gods.

However, he did not fulfill that duty, instead reigning in such a way to personally drive humanity away from the gods. Perhaps the King of Heroes had forgotten his charge, or perhaps he simply ignored it.

A spear was made to question, investigate and discipline the King of Heroes, who had failed in his duty. Namely, Enkidu was born as the concept of a god-forged weapon to pierce Gilgamesh's hostility and return the Chisel to the gods' own hands. Thus, the likelihood was high that he was chosen by the Holy Grail for the Lancer class.

It could also be said that his Noble Phantasm — an attack that used his own body as a weap-

on — was best personified by a Lancer.

He would simply puncture the World and stitch it back together.

If a wall existed in the chasm between Heaven and Earth, he existed to pierce that concept.

But, the gods miscalculated again, as they did with Gilgamesh's hostility.

The weapon gained knowledge of its own after descending to the earth and interacting with humans. It then tried to bridge the worlds of gods and men in its own way. The Chisel would indeed be returned to the gods — in other words, by approaching the gods.

That is, gods would not rule humanity. And humanity would make its way to the realm of the gods.

Thus, Enkidu chose to become a system.

He chose to be a weapon wielded by the King of the Earth, a pathway that would be fully expended for the evolution of the World.

And, he made a decision as a human.

He would be someone that rid the King of his solitude, and would always stand by his side.

In the instant that an attack to destroy Eternity drew near—

The planet sang.

A gigantic amount of mana gushed forth at Enkidu's feet, and moved to swallow Enuma Elish head-on.

"Don't hold back."

Those words were not directed at the Heroic Spirit he was facing.

As the King of Heroes had spoken to Ea, so too did Enkidu speak to the massive amount of mana engulfing the Void cracks in space. He spoke directly to the planet.

"I am a weapon. Wield me as you please."

Instantly, enough mana surged forth to make the earlier flow seem like a mere trickle. Several times more mana geysered from the earth's surface, becoming a cyclone of energy enveloping Enkidu's body.

Then, the energy became a titanic lance of light to pierce Heaven and Earth, with the Heroic Spirit as its core.

It was a concept that once propagated life.

It was the fiery coals that had been used to overcome mankind's first fears.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

It had walked alongside mankind through hell, and now, it sang of Paradise.

The Separation of Heaven and Earth was of little consequence.

From the past to the future. From the future to eternity.

It would link the land and sea to the heavens.

Terror was etched in the karmic endeavor of Life. Thus, with time humanity would rewrite it down to its genes.

Both a weapon and a tool, a mud doll without form.

Walking among humans, it, who had acquired the joy of friendship, shouted.

As this world was already Hell, humanity would create Paradise on its own, and comprehend the Beginning.

Enuma Elish!!!

O Humanity, Bind Thy Gods!!!

Whilst destruction had been loosed upon the earth, a mighty strike hurtled toward the sky.

Enkidu, The Chisel of the Gods, stitched the sundered World anew as it drove a straight line at its target, meeting the world-tearing Sword of Rupture in a violent clash.

And then...

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In a dream

“...What’s that?”

In bed, Kuruoka Tsubaki opened her eyes as she felt something like the ground shaking.

With sleepy eyes, she turned toward the window, but everything seemed the same as usual.

As soon as she thought that, a brief flash lighted up the far-off sky, and soon after that, she heard a dull noise that seemed to tear at the atmosphere.

“Thunder!”

A chill ran down the girl’s back, and she rolled up into a ball. She pulled the covers over herself, and began trembling.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry...”

It wasn’t clear what she was apologizing to. The young girl continued mumbling words of apology at each peal of thunder.

She was used to being the subject of magical experiments by her parents from an early age, and she didn’t fear the spirit that bore her no ill will. Yet, it seemed that she was terrified of natural phenomena such as thunder and earthquakes.

“Thunder is so scary...”

At that, the Darkness in the back of the room stirred, and gently encircled the bed, shielding the girl from the light and sound.

Then, the Darkness divided into a second Darkness, and slipped through a crack in the window, exiting the house.

It was a world within a dream.

There were no signs of people.

Tsubaki’s parents were neatly lined up on the bed, sleeping like the dead.

The fragment of the Darkness — the Pale Rider — used its own energy to ride the north wind blowing towards the south of town.

This strange realm was a psuedo-world created by linking Tsubaki’s mystic energy and dreams to the foundation of the Holy Grail War embedded in the land of Snowfield. It was something approaching the incarnated mental worlds called Reality Marbles by magi, but as a space born of the convergence of many conditions such as the mana-rich land and Tsubaki’s innate skills, it obviously could not persist without limit.

The surroundings of the world were limited to the Snowfield region that was the foundation of the Holy Grail War, and the world was bound by many rules — but Tsubaki, who had unconsciously manifested this phenomenon, had no way of knowing that.

Her only wish was to spend happy days with her beloved family.

As long as its Master wished it, the Pale Rider would only use its power to make Tsubaki’s wish come true.

It had no emotions, nor did it desire the Holy Grail. It only functioned as an indifferent system to fulfill its Master’s wishes, like a Holy Grail whose functions were greatly restricted.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

Nor did Tsubaki have an outrageous wish to make of the Holy Grail. If she did, it would be to keep living as she did, into old age. In this regard, her team could be considered the victors of the Holy Grail War.

The Pale Rider silently continued to protect her. It acted to rid Tsubaki of her troubles.

For example, thunder and lightning had appeared in the dream world, so the Pale Rider was wriggling its way into the real world, to dispel the distortion in reality.

The Pale Rider had no emotion, just as humanity's fear of disease would never die.

Therefore, it had no concept of destruction. Therefore, it had no fear.

It didn't matter that the obstacles were so powerful they could well be the trials described in the Book of Revelation.

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Reality — Desert Region

Power and power.

Noble Phantasm and Noble Phantasm.

Divinity and weaponry.

When the two extremes crashed into each other, the spatial distortion blasted the surroundings asunder.

In the interstice between the two attacks, an immense struggle of energies commenced.

In the distant past, the Sacred Prostitute watched the heroes clash from the ancient city of Uruk, speaking these words in a daze:

"I felt as if the World was born seven times, and destroyed seven times."

In the midst of such swirling power, the two Heroic Spirits never ceased smiling.

It was not as if they could spare a moment to laugh. If either one let his guard down for even a moment, his body would be rendered unto oblivion. Both of them knew that.

Nonetheless, it was but a trivial matter. To these two, this was mere child's play. A childish contest of wits.

Still, neither could afford to restrain himself nor give the other any ground.

They only wanted to compare their powers. They wanted to struggle, and bash fist against fist.

That they were technically enemies in the Holy Grail War was little more than happenstance. It simply was the fastest way for each to feel for himself that his friend was there.

Their friendly battle just happened to involve everything around them.

Besides, the energies of the two Noble Phantasms cancelled each other out, and dispersed into the surroundings.

Though, this “dispersion” left tornadoes that ripped and tore their way into the surrounding landscape.

“I’m relieved.”

As the winds howled, the two descended to the ground, and Gilgamesh finally spoke.

“I was puzzled by the remarkably nostalgic form you’ve taken, but it seems that you haven’t regressed on the inside.”

Somehow, Enkidu appeared to have taken on the form that he had when the two met for the first time. Enkidu’s original form was that of a shapeless mud doll, so he had probably taken many shapes over time.

The King of Heroes was haughty to the end, but he still spoke with an attitude clearly different from the one he showed to others.

“Still, to come all the way out to the desert to receive me... you’re a selfish one, as always. Only you would be foolish enough to prioritize your concern for a forest over welcoming me.”

He had not actually expected Enkidu to come greet him, and spoke with casual sarcasm.

“Dreary land that this is, even I notice sand worms and rats. Have you finally matured that you can distinguish between lives?”

His words were pointed, but there was no hint of hostility.

While the avatar of arrogance criticized his friend’s selfishness, Enkidu shook his head, replying,

“I don’t have the right. As a tool, how I ought to be depends on the will of my Master. Ah, but I do make the final judgment. It’s better if I’m the only one the desert resents.”

Gilgamesh sighed with exasperation.

“Are you going on about that again? You haven’t changed, even in death.”

“Meanwhile, you’ve been reborn as a living tyrant.”

The retort to Gilgamesh, who had been called a wise king in his youth, was equally sarcastic. But it too contained no animosity.

“Indeed. If my childhood self knew of my current state, I daresay he’d commit suicide.”

Gilgamesh spoke so casually compared to the time when he had manifested in the cave that one might wonder if he was a different person. If the magi that knew his usual attitude saw this now, they would probably be wondering why the androgynous Heroic Spirit hadn’t been killed yet.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

The reasons were many, but there was one objective factor in particular that a skeptical magus would probably accept — though, this reason actually didn't even register in Gilgamesh's mind.

Even for the King of Heroes, this opponent could not be easily killed.

Such was the strength of this Heroic Spirit.

Anyone who had observed their clash would agree.

And, the fight still wasn't over.

Still in Gilgamesh's hand, Ea's blade once again began rotating, and the space behind Gilgamesh began lighting up as if in response.

"Is that so? In your youth, if you were the boy that Shamhat described, I think you would have chosen to live. Not for the future, but for the citizens of Uruk who were still alive in that moment."

Countless tentacles stirred from the sand, as if they were a part of Enkidu's body.

In response, Gilgamesh again used his Noble Phantasm to float into the sky. Then, his treasury — the King's Treasures, Gate of Babylon — opened in the space behind him, and dozens, then hundreds of Noble Phantasms emerged.

Simultaneously, the ends of Enkidu's earth tentacles transformed into countless different weapons, from spears, to swords, to bows.

One breath later, over a thousand projectiles thundered into each other.

The cacophony of clashing metal rang out over the windy battlefield.

Only two Heroic Spirits stood there.

Still, the clash between the two Heroic Spirits, each an army unto itself, was so violent that it could only be called a battlefield.

The collected Noble Phantasms of the most ancient hero, said to be the prototypes of all Noble Phantasms, were innumerable.

Weapons that would be the ultimate trump cards of ordinary Heroic Spirits were hurled forth without reserve.

To counter this, Enkidu became one with the earth, transformed the body given to him by the gods, and created countless divine weapons.

It was a furious, inexhaustible exchange of ultimate attacks.

The paradoxical scene illustrated how well matched their friendship was.

The conversation had been cut short again, but neither was upset by this.

It was enough for them to be here together, in this place.

Whether it was a match of wits through words, or a fight to draw blood, all were worthwhile

“conversation” to both of them.

This was all the more why Gilgamesh found it unforgivable that someone would dare to throw cold water on their joyous reunion after thousands of years.

A chill wind blew behind Enkidu.

While continuing to control countless weapons of sand, he looked to the north.

“It’s coming.”

“Oh?”

Sensing that it was no bluff, Gilgamesh also turned his attention northward, but he could feel nothing.

It was probably because Enkidu possessed the highest level of Presence Detection that he was able to pick up on the subtle presence.

Originally, neither Gilgamesh nor Enkidu would have paid such a feeble aura any mind. In fact, they had completely ignored the familiars spread out across the area.

But this was different.

It was far fainter than the birds and insects that served as familiars. A strangely weak presence.

Enkidu instinctively felt a bizarre pressure from the aura.

“...Something terrible is coming. It’s probably the sort that’s my natural enemy.”

Gilgamesh raised his eyebrows at that.

Enkidu had no weaknesses. Gilgamesh knew this fact well.

If there was one exception, it would be the death that hounded him — Ruin itself, none other than the curse of death that the gods had placed on him.

“...I see. I lost myself in our celebration. I’d completely forgotten that there are thieves about who intend to lay hands on my Grail, my treasure.”

“Do I count as one of those thieves?”

“You don’t need the likes of the Holy Grail, do you? You yourself are capable of becoming a flawed wishing machine.”

At Gilgamesh’s strange, offhand remark, Enkidu replied,

“I can only imitate it at best. Well, my wish has already been granted anyway, and it’s not as if my Master desires the Holy Grail.”

Casually speaking of forfeiting the war, Enkidu focused an intense gaze northward while he kept talking.

“But, I’m obligated to protect my Master. I can’t disappear because of some interference

Fate/Strange Fake 1

here. I'm going to run away for now, so let's continue this another time."

As Enkidu said "run away" with a smile, Gilgamesh frowned.

"What sort of mongrel is your Master, that you would go to such lengths? If it is of such worth, let me judge it myself."

If it bored him, he would end the Master right there.

Such was the implication in Gilgamesh's words, but Enkidu shook his head, chuckling,

"No way. You only know how to judge gods, humans and wine, right?"

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Gilgamesh's face was full of question marks, though he wasn't actually that interested in Enkidu's Master. He let out a very unkingly sigh, and said,

"In that case, let us continue the party after I execute the insurgents."

Raising his head, Gilgamesh's eyes contained quiet rage at the curs who had dared to interrupt him.

While continuing to shoot down the torrent of Noble Phantasms with his tentacles as if nothing had changed, Enkidu tried to soothe the irritated king.

"You can't do that, Gil. A king isn't supposed to make a gloomy face like that. When a king worries his subjects, it upsets them even more than the fear of a tyrant would."

"You're lecturing me on the way of kings right after deciding to turn tail? A thousand transformations you might have, but you really haven't changed."

With a broad grin, Gil raised Ea again. In response, the Noble Phantasms scattered about the area roared. Ea, strengthened by the power of the Noble Phantasms, twisted the World once more.

"This will be my final blow tonight. Accept this in place of a contract for our reunion."

"Of course."

Enkidu fused with the earth again, and spoke while gathering power in his body.

"I'll run away right after that. Though I feel bad for Ea, using it as a smokescreen."

"Don't jest. Is not all of Creation blinded by my power?"

Then, the two smiled again, and in the next instant—

With even greater power than before, the two Enuma Elish, the two creation epics, met and left their marks on the world.

The sight left scars on this desert land, and in the hearts of most of the watching magi, that even time would find difficult to heal.

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Several minutes later...

The raging tornadoes had delayed it greatly, but the fragment of the Pale Rider finally arrived in the middle of the desert.

But, everyone was already gone, and there was no spatial distortion to be found.

For a short while, it rode the wind and circled the area, and then the Pale Rider allowed that body to dissipate from the world.

It would not pursue the Heroic Spirits that had disappeared.

After all, it had come to eliminate the sound of thunder that had frightened Tsubaki — and those sounds were now gone, so there was no need to do anything else.

All traces of Heroic Spirits were finally gone from the desert, and it returned to silence.

The bodies of some bird familiars that had grazed the Pale Rider as it moved lay comatose on the desert floor. The moonlight illuminated the land, as it always had.

Hence, the first battle of the False Holy Grail War drew to a close.

Assassin, who had felt the enormous powers, hardened her hostility and her caution, while the bloodsucker was wide-eyed at the strength of the King of Heroes and his opponent.

“Incredible! Beyond all expectation! Is this not the power to violate my Servant!?” he muttered in admiration.

The magi in the city reacted in various ways. Some who sensed the danger fled, while others embraced their ambitions now that they had witnessed the miracle of Heroic Spirits, and began forming schemes to keep their rights as Masters from being stolen.

The epicenter of the fierce clash between magical energies was observed in a far-off country — it was noted in the Clock Tower, headquarters of the Magic Association.

No one had died this time, but both the Magic Association and the Holy Church, who had planned to only quietly observe the ritual, revised their plans. This flow of mana had been outside of their jurisdictions.

This conflict could no longer be ignored.

An unspeakable war between magi had ignited in the land of Snowfield.

In light of this, the genuine and the spurious were no longer concepts that mattered.

Prologue VII

“Visitor & ●●●●”

Prologue VII

Visitor & ●●●●

The woman was a traveler who had arrived in Snowfield, unaware that the Holy Grail War had begun just a half day earlier.

She entered a drugstore while checking something on the screen of her mobile phone. She asked the man minding the store whether there was a cheap, single-story motel nearby.

The drugstore clerk wore a mohican haircut that clashed with his friendly manner, and he gave the woman directions to a motel. He suggested some better hotels nearby in the same price range, but the woman politely refused.

The mohawk-sporting man looked at her strangely, until he eyed her hands and the nape of her neck.

“Yo, those are some sick tattoos,” he commented.

The woman answered him with a courteous smile, and left the store. She looked at her hands. Identical patterns were inscribed on the woman’s left and right hands. She knew what they were. The same mark had been engraved on both of her shoulders, and her back.

The young woman was around twenty years of age, yet baby-faced even for a Japanese person, so she probably looked two or three years younger than her actual age. She wore glasses of a conservative design in an attempt to look more mature, but as if to contradict that, her hair had been dyed a bold blonde color.

If she were a punk rocker, the patterns on her arms would certainly be a part of that fashion, but...

When she looked at the patterns, she glowered in irritation.

The mohawk-wearing clerk came out the door, and called her from behind.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

“Hey, miss!”

“Huh?”

As she turned, the man tossed the woman her phone.

“You forgot this.”

“...Ah, sorry.”

As she caught it, the woman realized that it was her own phone.

During their brief exchange, she had set it down at the register and forgotten it there.

Gripping her phone, the young woman bowed her head.

“Thank you so much.”

“You’ve dyed your hair, but are you Asian? Chinese... no, Cambodian?”

“...I’m from Japan.”

Hearing that, the man with the mohawk spread his hands amicably.

“Japan! You’ve come from a great place! My cousin went to Japan once. Those vending machines blew his mind!”

The woman answered the man’s sociable manner a bit more candidly this time.

“That’s nice to hear.”

“My dad went to Japan a long time ago, too. He brought back some souvenirs from a theme park called Kitsy Land, and we still have them at home. He said he saw ninjas, too! Are there a lot of those in Japan?”

Whether he was joking or actually asking a question, the excited mohican was about to say something else, when the conversation was deafened by the noise of a helicopter rotor overhead.

The helicopter was flying at a frightfully low altitude, and it headed away from town towards the desert.

When the noise finally faded, the mohican man clicked his tongue.

“Argh, those choppers have been flying around since this morning. Damn it, they’re ruining my business! I thought I’d be able to sell earplugs, but I haven’t been getting customers in the first place.”

It was common for American drug stores to combine features of both convenience and general store chains. Even this man, with his flashy wardrobe, was a trained pharmacist who could provide vaccinations and other such services. However, a glance at the goods on display would lead one to first assume that this was a convenience store.

His grumbling caused the woman to raise her eyebrows.

“Since this morning?”

“What, haven’t you been watching the news? It sounds like one of the gas company’s oil pipelines out in the desert exploded last night. It’s a hazard so they’re not letting anyone near the desert.”

“...Does that sort of thing happen often?”

“Nah, I’ve lived here my whole life and never seen anything like it. I had no idea there was something that dangerous beneath the desert this whole time.”

While listening to the man, the woman squinted at the figure of a helicopter flying away.

Like it was challenging something.

Or rather, fleeing from it.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

She mulled this over, unaware that she was being watched.

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Northern Snowfield

Kilometers away from the the skyline of the city's skyscrapers, a certain facility was ensconced on the threshold between a ravine and a forest.

At a glance, it might have seemed like a fortress built to guard the town, but it was not quite tall enough to be so. Several watch towers dotted the perimeter of the expansive building. A barbed wire fence further highlighted the strict security in place around the facility.

It was the Colesman Special Corrections Center, one of many privately owned prisons that could be found across the United States.

Private prisons were contracted by the state or federal government, and held inmates under private management. They generated revenue by using inmates as labor in manufacturing and other industries.

Government-run prisons were far from enough to hold a prison population of over two million. Thus, prisons managed as private businesses could be found all over the country, even in Snowfield. To the residents of the city, this was nothing out of the ordinary.

On the contrary, most people didn't even know that there was a prison. And of course, those who were aware of the underbelly of the prison's operations could hardly be counted among the normal populace.

As for the "underbelly"...

On an underground floor of the prison there was an "office" the size of a basketball court. Numerous monitors lined the walls of the dimly lit room, silently watched by men and women at their workstations.

A surveillance room was a perfectly normal fixture to have in a prison, but only a portion of the monitors showed images of the inside of the facility. Instead, the majority of the monitors displayed real-time footage from surveillance cameras throughout the city, ranging from the public to the hidden.

Some of the footage was clearly from the inside of private hotel rooms, and no show was made to hide this fact.

From this alone, one would conclude that this was a listening post of some intelligence agency — yet there was something definitely odd about some of the cameras.

Many of these cameras seemed to be using the vision of insects or mice, and their fields of view moved and swiveled on their own. One of the airborne points of view passed a mirror-like glass building for a moment, and the reflection was undoubtedly that of a flying bird.

It would be a little while longer before technology was able to create bird-like robots, so this was not a mechanical device, but rather a familiar.

The monitors were showing visual information from both familiars and conventional video cameras. This indiscriminate use of magic and technology was one of the reasons for the Coleman Special Corrections Center's existence.

In this surveillance room, Faldeus, the master of the familiars, was observing the monitors along with the other employees. However, his attention turned to one display in particular.

While the other monitors cycled between various viewpoints, Faldeus stopped the rotation on the display of interest, gazing at it.

“...Hm.”

Expressionless, the young magus was deep in thought. He had thought that a new magus had entered the city wards, but...

Who was this girl?

Manipulating the workstation's controls, he magnified the image. He was viewing a survei-

Fate/Strange Fake 1

llance camera in front of a drugstore on the southern outskirts of the city. It wasn't a familiar, but rather a cutting-edge optic made from the latest technology, which could resolve visual details even after several dozen powers of magnification.

What had caught Faldeus' attention was the mark on the woman's hand.

A magical pattern of some kind adorned the woman's hand. She was turning to look at a passing helicopter.

...Command Spells?

Faldeus pondered this, but didn't come to a conclusion.

The anomalous energy signature when the woman entered the ward was unanalyzable even to Faldeus, who had studied at the Clock Tower for many years. If she was a magus, she was making no attempt to hide her mystic energy.

In this part of his enormous underground workshop below the prison, Faldeus had his subordinates conducting 24-hour surveillance of the city. A large-scale ward to detect intruders was in place around the city, and countless cameras were synchronized for mass surveillance. All of these measures were designed to follow the movements of the magi, but skilled magi had many techniques to hide themselves, and it wasn't even possible to detect their entry.

In other words, this woman who failed to conceal her energy output was either a third-rate magus, or perhaps she was trying to provoke her watchers. Faldeus wondered which was the case.

However, she didn't seem to have noticed the ward, so the probability of the latter was low.

Considering this, Faldeus was convinced that it was still too early to draw conclusions.

There was also the case of Flat Escardos. Faldeus remembered how the young magus had taken a long-distance bus ride to Snowfield without concealing himself at all, before summoning a Servant in the middle of a public park.

As Rohngall's disciple, Faldeus had managed to avoid becoming embroiled in the inner politics of the Clock Tower without compromising his cover, but even he had heard rumors of Flat,

who had been nicknamed “The Accidental Phenom.”

Lord El-Melloi II was a magus who had participated in the Fourth Holy Grail War and survived unscathed. He taught lectures on Modern Magical Studies, which was derided as a worthless subject, but in the space of several years had produced a number of excellent magi under his tutelage, earning him a reputation as the “Genius Counselor.” And the pupil that had been under his wing the longest was none other than young Flat Escardos.

Faldeus had believed that the chances of Lord El-Melloi II’s participation were high due to his previous experience, but he hadn’t expected El-Melloi II’s pupil to come out here on his own, nor had he thought that Flat would repeatedly take actions that would be senseless from a magus’ perspective.

Then again, it was just another bullet on the growing list of events that fell outside Faldeus’ calculations, such as the unique Lancer Heroic Spirit, or whatever mysterious plot the Kuruoka couple was up to.

Faldeus hadn’t lost his composure, but he couldn’t conceal the frustration in his expression at the trouble this whole affair had become, as he watched the woman in front of the drugstore with the Command Spell-like markings on her hand.

“Should we contact the police chief?” asked one of Faldeus’ female employees, also watching the monitor.

He shook his head. “Stand by. We’ll continue gathering intel on Flat and the silver wolf for the time being.”

“Yes, sir.”

“We might have an alliance, but this tidbit isn’t something to be leaked to the other side.”

Faldeus’ own information network was rather different from the surveillance system that the police employed over the city. Furthermore, his personal knowledge surpassed that of the police chief.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

The primeval hero, Gilgamesh, and the successor to the land's native guardians, Tiné Chelc—

The enigmatic Heroic Spirit with what was believed to be powers of transformation, and an eccentric from the Clock Tower, Flat Escardos—

The Kuruoka couple, whose activities were unknown aside from the fact that they were confirmed to still be at home—

The silver wolf created as a magical reagent, and the Heroic Spirit hypothesized to be Enkidu—

Aside from these, there was also Jester Karture, a powerful Master candidate whose workshop appeared to have been attacked. Numerous burned corpses and one dessicated corpse had been found. Perhaps a Servant had gone on a rampage, or the Master had decided to kill his disciples for some reason. Faldeus' people were still chasing leads.

“The Heroic Spirit that the Kuruokas summoned interests me after all.”

They would be enemies once the war began. That had been the deal, but it was strange for them to have made no moves at all. A magical call had been made to the Kuruokas to verify.

When a lifeless voice answered, “Sorry. We’ve got important business, so we don’t have time for the Holy Grail War,” Faldeus inferred that something abnormal might have happened.

There shouldn’t have been anything more important than the Holy Grail War to the Kuruoka couple. Yet, this was too odd for a bluff.

There was the possibility that they were under powerful hypnosis by a third party. But the Kuruokas weren’t inexperienced magi. If they were being hypnotized or otherwise controlled, then it would likely be by a high-ranking magus. Faldeus couldn’t ignore the possibility that the Magic Association had dispatched an elite agent.

In that case, Escardos’ actions might be some sort of bizarre feint. Well, even for a feint, that would be just too weird... the spooks in Intelligence could sort this out.

There were still other matters to worry about.

The familiars that Faldeus and his subordinates had deployed to the desert had lost connection yesterday. Other magi had sent countless familiars to the area, but those had been largely annihilated in the clash between the two Servants. Faldeus was aware of this, but something odd stuck out.

Including Faldeus' own, multiple familiars had been discovered in an unconscious state. The unconscious familiars also had strange sores on their skin. Once it was believed that they were afflicted by some curse or disease, they had been sent to the laboratory for analysis.

"Good grief. It'll be hard to wrap this up neatly with this many irregularities," Faldeus sighed, before quickly resetting his expression.

"Miss Aldora, assign Level 2 surveillance to the woman on camera B-357."

"Yes, sir."

After giving the order, Faldeus slowly stood up from his chair. As he made to leave the room, he turned to the monitors displaying the interior of the prison.

Men and women were displayed, one by one, in what appeared to be separate rooms.

"Soon, it'll be time for you to move as well."

Finishing his inspection of the sinister-looking people, Faldeus muttered to himself as he left his workshop.

"Honestly, these seven days are looking so fun it makes me want to puke."

As he left the room, a monitor displayed a view from a helicopter. It was the evidence of a clash between two Heroic Spirits — carved into the earth and baked into glass by extreme heat and pressure was a massive crater, several kilometers across.

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Fate/Strange Fake 1

Las Vegas, Nevada

A strange chapel was built atop a certain casino.

There were countless churches in Las Vegas, but this one was particularly unremarkable, lacking ornamentation such as stained glass windows or even any symbols of the Church. People thought it was just a decoration as part of the casino's theme.

It was the kind of place where gamblers occasionally came to pray for forgiveness when they were down on their luck, or where the winners might come to give their thanks.

"I assume there's no need for a background briefing, hmm."

There was a meagerly furnished lounge above the entrance to the chapel. The room was rather cramped, and a charitable person would probably consider this the most modest church in Las Vegas.

A careworn, elderly priest slightly tilted his head away from the altar, and began talking as if to himself.

"Well, how should I put it? The only clergy in Snowfield right now are inexperienced. I wouldn't expect them to be able to do anything about something like a Holy Grail War."

In addition to its veneer as a religious organization, the Holy Church was the largest institution in the world. Based in Western Europe, it boasted a system that spanned the globe.

The Church's mission was the governance of all miracles and magics in the world, and it stood in direct opposition to the Magic Association, which concealed miracles from the world.

However, this relationship was somewhat different when it came to the Holy Grail War.

If a Holy Grail was the genuine article, then it was a treasure of mankind to be managed by the Church. They also had a duty to make sure that this miraculous ritual was not abused to bedevil the public.

Initially, the Church had only quietly monitored the conflict, but after the indiscriminate

slaughter that tainted the Second Holy Grail War, it entered the war in an official capacity as its administrator.

If the anomalous tides of magical energy observed last night had been the product of Heroic Spirits, then this affair fell under the jurisdiction of the Church.

The Great Fire of Fuyuki, the destruction of a high-rise hotel, the summoning of a sea monster, and the loss of military fighter jets had all occurred during the Fourth Holy Grail War. The Church's mission was all the more important now that the potential for even greater catastrophes was present in this war. If the recent energy spike had occurred on the outskirts of the city, then Snowfield would have been wiped from the face of the earth.

Currently, the existence of the desert crater was being covered up. Someone was exercising magical and political power to prevent leaks via every avenue, be it satellite imaging or the press.

During the past Holy Grail Wars in Fuyuki, the Church had moved to conceal knowledge of those highly visible "accidents" as part of their mission to administer the sacred artifact.

This time, however, the Holy Church was not involved with the incident in the desert. This was a point of grave concern to the Assembly of the Eighth Sacrament.

It had been determined that the cover-up currently underway in the desert was operated by neither the Holy Church nor the Magic Association, but rather by a third party with the power to control law enforcement and national intelligence agencies. The Church didn't have all the details, but at the very least it was clear that the federal government of the United States was involved.

Normally, one might think that the Church officials should be thanking these outsiders for relieving them of this most troublesome job... but it also carried the implicit message, "Your power is unnecessary to this Holy Grail War." Bluntly put, someone was telling them to piss off.

There were some who resented that notion and found it unforgivable. These would be those who presumed to watch over the people of Snowfield. Other voices of different intent spoke of entering Snowfield's Holy Grail War by force.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

And so, the order had come down to the priests in closest proximity to Snowfield — who were qualified to be the war's administrators — to proceed to the city with all due haste.

"Yes, hmm, how to put it, indeed. These are direct orders from the headquarters of the Assembly of the Eighth Sacrament. I'm reluctant to have you leave town, but there isn't anyone else in the immediate vicinity of the site, hm."

The priest seemed rather timid as he continued his spiel.

"If you don't go, then the next best choice would be me, but look, action's really more your thing, yes? Hm. You see, I think someone with stamina is better suited to the task this time. Hm. Well, if we were in a state where the Holy Church had more pull, we could force the government to do what we want, but we're not as strong here."

It was true that the Holy Church had the power to move nations. Yet, this was only true in countries where the Church's influence was strong.

In America, the Holy Church's influence varied by state, and the Church could apply considerable pressure when circumstances such as the elected president and public opinion were favorable. In the states where the Church's influence was weak, however, it could be difficult to manipulate events.

Even in the case of Fuyuki, Japan, it had only been possible to hush up numerous disasters thanks to decades of preparation for the Holy Grail Wars. The covering up of incidents such as the loss of the fighter planes had required political capital from every possible angle.

"Well, that's the story. They probably targeted an area where our influence was weak to set their plans in motion. The Gospel has been slow in reaching Snowfield in particular due to loud opposition by the native tribe in charge."

His eyes still on the Bible in his hand, the old priest turned to face a part of the chapel.

"Erm, uh, are you listening? Hanza?"

A different priest, sitting at the end of one of the pews, replied without taking his eyes off

his cell phone.

“Relax, Father. I didn’t hear a single word.”

“You shouldn’t ignore people, hmm.”

“Begging your pardon, government affairs are irrelevant to me. Father, all you need to relay to me is the will of the Lord. A single sentence will suffice, such as ‘Annihilate the enemy.’”

The second priest was pressing buttons on his phone at an abnormal speed. He seemed to be composing a document of some kind.

“No, no, your job is to be an administrator this time, not an Executor. Well, depending on how things go, your other skills might be called for anyway.”

The elder priest sighed at his colleague.

“Hey, umm, Hanza, maybe you should put down your phone when people are talking to you, yes?”

“And you, Father, should look at people when they speak to you.”

With that, the priest named Hanza looked away from his phone and at the priest who was reading scripture. The old man let out an even bigger sigh, and glanced at Hanza.

“Also, in front of other people you need to talk and act more like a priest, yes?”

“I understand, Father. I will change into civilian clothing when I go to the casino in the other city.”

“Hm, I’d prefer it if you didn’t visit casinos in the first place, yes?”

Hanza raised his hands and slowly stood up, ignoring the old priest.

He appeared to be in his mid-30s, and cut a striking figure with a flashy eyepatch covering

Fate/Strange Fake 1

his right eye. Hanza was a man of Spanish descent, with a look of fearless determination in his eye that gave him the air of a passionate film actor.

“Now, let us be off, Quartet. It’s been a long time since we’ve had work.”

Four young nuns emerged from the shadows, silently falling in line behind Hanza.

The old priest watched them go, when something soundlessly shot forth from his right hand. Perhaps by some special technique, a metallic plate hurled from the priest’s hand with the speed of a bullet. Until several decades ago, the blue coin had been used as a high-value chip in the casino below the church.

In the next instant, Hanza’s arm twisted at an impossible angle, caught the coin, and soundlessly returned the throw as swiftly as it had come.

When the old priest effortlessly caught the coin, it crumbled in his hand. He looked and saw that the metal coin had fallen apart into sixteen equal portions, like a pizza.

“Ah, sorry. I thought your skills had rusted since you were so glued to your phone. Hm.”

Hanza turned slowly to face the old priest, who shrugged.

Then, with a guileless smile on his face, the priest sarcastically murmured, “You could use some action yourself, Father.”

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Somewhere in London — Clock Tower

The Clock Tower had been stirred into a frenzy, just like their rivals in the Holy Church.

There was, of course, a time difference between London and Snowfield. At the time that the students of the Clock Tower might have been beginning their morning lectures, the opening shots of the Holy Grail War were fired in the desert of Snowfield.

The magi of the Clock Tower either detected the energies given off by the clash, or heard reports from magi in the vicinity of the clash. Before noon, talk of the war had spread throughout the Clock Tower.

Among the uneasy magi were two men, hastily walking towards the lecture hall for Modern Magical Studies.

“I still can’t believe that Faldeus was a spy...”

“It’s the truth. He’s been ruled out as a double agent.”

Walking in front of the young magus was a huge, eerie humanoid figure, not unlike a scarecrow. Its body was wrapped in bandages and burlap, and a hooded coat further concealed its visage.

The large figure was not a human, but rather a makeshift puppet controlled by Rohngall, whose doppelganger doll had been turned into Swiss cheese several days prior.

“But Master, can’t you do something about this puppet? Everyone is staring.”

“It also shames me to use this slipshod disgrace of a doll! It’s possible that Faldeus may have sabotaged the other dolls. Still, nothing ventured...”

The doll’s construction was crude, but its sensors appeared to be functioning properly. It focused on the pupil in tow and asked, “Are you nervous?”

“Yes. This is my first time meeting a Lord, after all.”

Lord. The twelve departments of the Clock Tower were each governed by a department head with this title.

The youth’s anxiety at meeting someone of such great stature was clear on his face, and he asked another question.

“What sort of person is he? Um... Lord El-Melloi II?”

Fate/Strange Fake 1

“...Ten years ago, even I didn’t think he was anyone special. It was assumed that he was a mere puppet the El-Melloi family had, at their convenience, forced into the unenviable position of heading that hodgepodge of subjects known as Modern Magical Studies. But, we soon learned that we were terribly wrong.”

Rohngall continued his brisk pace, calmly spinning his tale.

“Verner Sisimund, the heir to Butterfly Magic. Roland Perjinski. Org Lam. The sisters Radia Pentel and Nazica Pentel. Fezgram Vol Senbern. What do you think these names all have in common?”

“Aren’t they all magi who have been promoted to the ranks Brand and Pride in the last few years? The rise of so many young magi has caused quite a stir. We’re excited about it too.”

The magi of the Association were assigned titles befitting their rank, and the titles below Grand, such as Brand and Pride, were granted to magi of a far greater caliber than their mundane colleagues.

Rohngall did not correct his student, adding, “They share one other quality.”

“Eh?” The student cocked his head, bemused.

“All were disciples of Professor El-Melloi.”

“I”

“El-Melloi II himself is but a low-ranking magus. However, his true worth lies elsewhere. His outlook is uncharacteristically broad for a magus, and he has the ability to seize upon and bring out one’s deepest talents. He may well be the greatest instructor in the Clock Tower, and he doesn’t even crush his pupils like Zelretch does.”

The student had gone speechless with disbelief. Rohngall continued,

“This is true even of his current students. All of his graduates have achieved the rank of Pride or greater within a decade, without exception.”

“Without exception...?”

“There is talk that numerous people may soon obtain the Grand title, of which there have been few even throughout the Clock Tower’s entire history. Perhaps it is a blessing that the man doesn’t take many students, but if he were to call upon his former disciples one day, it could rock the history of the Clock Tower.”

“Incredible...”

The student had heard that El-Melloi was a popular instructor who had earned many nicknames. But, this was the first time he heard why the professor was so highly evaluated. He was overcome by respect and awe.

“What is his standing within the Clock Tower?”

“If Lord Belfban represents the stubborn old guard, then I might place El-Melloi II in the flexible reformist camp. Well, he is the type to respect one’s merits, regardless of tradition or novelty. Rather than label him a conservative or a reformer, it might be most accurate to call him a neutral party.”

“.....”

Rohngall offered one last word of advice to his student before they made their visit.

“...Don’t assume you’ll be able to figure him out with a glance. You’ll be the one that gets taken apart instead.”

When the door to the lecture hall opened, Lord El-Melloi II was preparing to give his afternoon lecture.

“Mr. Rohngall, what can I do for you?”

Despite his status, the soft-spoken Lord didn’t seem to project a particularly unapproachable aura.

“It is quite bold of you to hold normal lectures in these circumstances, Lord.”

Fate/Strange Fake 1

“I considered suspending classes, but there is only so much I can do about the situation this time. Thus, I judged it best to return the atmosphere of the Clock Tower, now so agitated, to its usual calm.”

“Such humility. Given that this is a Holy Grail War, I am sure that you above all can best predict its course.”

“?”

Rohngall’s disciple cocked his head, not understanding what his mentor was referring to.

El-Melloi II was silent for a moment, then sighed quietly.

“If I had the skill to divine a conclusion based on my feelings alone, that would be optimal... but my inexperience leaves me no other choice than to cautiously observe the situation.”

Rohngall pressed past the Lord’s self-deprecation.

“It is that very prudent counsel I seek. What do you believe to be the goals of the master-minds behind this war?”

“...Even if, at this stage, all I can only offer is mostly half-baked speculation?”

“By all means.”

El-Melloi II frowned deeply in silent thought for several seconds before speaking again.

“From my point of view, there are three or four parties involved, each with different objectives. At the minimum, one party that is suppressing information, and another party that seeks to broadcast information have each exposed themselves... Though, it seems certain that these two powers are cooperating in spite of their different intentions.”

“There are indeed many mysteries about their actions...”

“I think we can assume that for all of the organizations involved, their objective isn’t the manifestation of the Holy Grail. Perhaps they aim to stabilize and mass-produce the Holy Grail War system rather than the Grail itself. The things they have done to provoke us, and the enticement of many magi to the city, may be part of their plans to analyze the Holy Grail War.”

Rohngall shook his head at El-Melloi II’s hypothesis.

“Unbelievable... that an outsider would try to analyze a miracle such as the Third Sorcery is just... Furthermore, you’d imply that they would attempt such a farce despite already holding authority over the system?”

“You’re right that magi aiming to reach the Root would never entertain the thought. However, the fact remains that many powers and ideologies are involved in this conflict. Among them...”

El-Melloi II momentarily stopped speaking to take a deep breath, before continuing.

“This is little more than a guess, a prediction based on a hunch, but... there is one more thing.”

“One more?”

“You may find this difficult to understand, and possibly quite unforgivable...”

His brow was creased in a wrinkled frown, yet he continued calmly.

“There are those who would seek to degrade the Holy Grail War into a game or a spectacle.”

“That’s... unthinkable. Whatever for?”

“I don’t understand their reasons. But it is no laughing matter.”

El-Melloi II closed his eyes and recalled the Holy Grail War that he knew.

“Among the Masters and Heroic Spirits that fought in the past, there were those who treated

Fate/Strange Fake 1

the Holy Grail War itself as an amusement. At least they were serious about it. They bet their lives and seized the moment. But this time, I feel that there are people with a commanding view of the Holy Grail War who intend to make a disgrace of the ritual. It's nothing but an insult directed at them. This means that I must..."

El-Melloi II suddenly stopped, realizing that his fists were tightly clenched. He clicked his tongue at his own display of emotion, and lowered his eyes.

"...Pardon me. I got a tad emotional."

"Not at all, Lord. This has been very illuminating."

"From here, once more playing pieces are assembled, the whole picture should become clear. If I take any action, it will be after that."

Then, he muttered another self-deriding remark.

"...Not that I can guarantee I'll be of any use once they've made their move."

After soliciting several more theories from El-Melloi II, Rohngall exchanged farewells and spoke praisingly, "I'm impressed, Lord, that you dispatched your own student to the site so quickly."

"My student?"

Something was terribly out of place.

"Yes. The personnel we deployed to Snowfield yesterday reported seeing one of your students some time ago..."

"...What do you mean? I don't remember sending any-"

Once El-Melloi II thought for a bit, it suddenly hit him.

Today, one student had been absent from his lecture.

While classes had been suspended the past several days, he hadn't seen that student even once.

"No..."

El-Melloi fished out his mobile phone, and dialed a number.

"——The number you have dialed has not been recognized. Please check and try again.——"

When he heard that message, the pit in his stomach sank even deeper. He called a different number.

"...Yeah, it's me. I need you to look into something right away. A student's entry and exit records. Check whether Flat Escardos has left the country."

It sounded like someone in charge of student administration was on the line.

About 30 seconds passed before the clerk on the phone replied, "Mr. Escardos boarded a flight to America three days ago. The reason for his visit was... tourism. He left a note: 'Thanks, Professor! Long live the London Star!' What could it mean, I wonder?"

"That's all. Thank you," he answered quickly, and ended the call. Then...

Numerous memories of Flat ran rampant in El-Melloi II's mind.

From petty mischief such as coming into someone's room and registering his user ID for a new game as "London☆Star," to contaminating his honorable sister's mercury maid Mystic Code with knowledge from a strange movie, to sneaking aboard a casino ship owned by a vampire king and inciting a riot... memories of Flat's incessant troublemaking replayed over and over.

Wrenching his cheeks in anguish, El-Melloi II cursed the entire world.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

“Fuck me...”

“Eh?”

Rohngall’s student heard El-Melloi II say something, but he couldn’t understand it. He certainly heard some words, but dismissed the notion that such crude slang could have come from the mouth of the esteemed character with whom they had been having a rational discussion.

“Erm, did something hap-”

But it was too late.

Blood rushed to El-Melloi’s head, and he collapsed in a heap on the lecture platform.

“Lord!?! Lord!?!?”

The young magus was shaken by the sight. But, from the side of the room, one of the students spoke up. She was a young woman, perhaps twenty years old.

“The master is always like this when it comes to Mr. Escardos.”

“Huh? Ah, I see...”

“I’ll see him to the infirmary. Excuse us.”

With that, the woman politely nodded at Rohngall and his student before hoisting her Lord and mentor over her shoulder.

They watched the bizarre sight leave without knowing how to react. Rohngall spoke to his student.

“How should I put this... he is unprecedented in a number of ways... and he seems terribly busy.”

“Yes... you’re right. Let us leave it at that.”

A heavy sigh breathed from the mouth of Rohngall’s puppet, followed by a remark tinged with pity.

“There would be no humor in the death of a Lord of the Clock Tower from the likes of overwork.”

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United States — Snowfield — Police Station

“Sup, dawg! Mornin’, bro!”

In the office of the police chief, Orlando responded to the screeching phone call with a dour expression.

“It’s the middle of the afternoon. Get back to work.”

“Hey now, you tryin’ to work your Servant to death? Anyway, listen. I asked you to hook a brotha up with some ladies, right? Why don’t you throw in one of this country’s delicacies while you’re at it? Just so you know, I ain’t forking nothin’ over. You’re buying.”

“.....Please tell me that isn’t the only reason you called me.”

“You got a problem with that?”

This was either a bluff to hide Caster’s embarrassment, or a test of some kind. Having decided this, Orlando decided to try sincerity.

“I’m sorry for hanging up on you last night. You’ve probably heard the news by now... what do you think about the incident in the desert?”

The women and whatnot had to be small talk. As a fellow Servant, Caster probably wanted to discuss the battle that had occurred in the desert.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

“The hell you talkin’ ‘bout? What went down in the desert?” Caster’s confusion was clear over the line.

“...Didn’t you even notice?”

“Well, I drank myself to sleep yesterday. I was just calling to tell you about this fine broad I saw on TV.”

“It seems I was a fool to expect anything from you as a Heroic Spirit,” Orlando muttered in exasperation, as he moved to hang up the phone.

“Don’t call me again. I’ll call you.”

In truth, Orlando had resolved to ignore Caster from now on, and pass any necessary messages through his secretary.

“Damn, bro, you this cold to that Francesca chick too?”

“...!”

Francesca. A chill ran down Orlando’s entire body as Caster uttered her name.

Perhaps sensing the chief’s reaction over the line, Caster cheerfully continued.

“So you’re finally listening. Or maybe you’d understand better if we talked about that Fal-deus dude? Your Kuruoka friends from Japan are a hot topic too, yeah?”

“You bastard... How... How much do you know?”

It was possible to share memories and perceptions between Master and Servant. However, since the chief had completely shut off the link to his Servant, Caster shouldn’t have been able to read his memories.

Then, how had the man come to know so much of their classified intelligence?

Had he come to see what they were scheming and spied on them in spirit form?

That troublesome hag couldn't possibly have sought a meeting with him, could she?

Orlando was plagued by such doubts, but Caster's answer turned out to be simpler than that.

"These days, anything is possible with the internet and telephone. Aren't you underestimating modern technology? Did you really think I wouldn't know how to type on a keyboard?"

"Impossible! There's no way that information would be on the internet!"

"Never mind that. I have my ways. Bro, you don't know everything about my Noble Phantasms, right? We both keep our secrets. I thought I'd have some fun, so I showed my hand just a bit."

"....."

Caster put the nail in the coffin while Orlando fumed in silence.

"Oh, right. I just remembered that Fuyuki place in Japan, yeah? The flow of its ley lines is supposed to be about as good as the ones around here. Well, it's not like I can sense ley lines to begin with, so whatever. Speaking of land, maybe I should dial up our little custodian Tiné Chelc next time. You might be one of the magi that cooked up this party, but did you know that your organization is riddled with their spies? My bad, I'm rambling. Though, if this were one of my books I'd write an even longer monologue. Witty banter is essential after all, bro."

Orlando roared into the receiver at Caster, who was surely wearing a shit-eating grin.

"You shut your mouth right this instant! Who do you think-"

As he said that, Caster cut in.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

“You worried about wiretaps?”

“.....!”

“Someone might be listening in, magically or electronically. No matter how secure your own phones are, you can’t deny that they might try something on my end or any of the circuits in between. Haha! It’d probably be a real pain in the ass for you if I kept shootin’ my mouth off, huh?”

Caster was as flippant as ever, but the police chief felt an unfathomable pressure behind the Servant’s words. The thought of how Orlando had been so careless as to let himself be backed into this corner shook him to his core.

Orlando took a deep breath. The chief had already regained his bearings, and made his next move.

“I see. Allow me to sincerely apologize. It seems I severely underestimated you.”

“What’s this now? Dude, you’re creeping me out.”

“I’m saying that I’ve grasped your abilities. If you still insist on flapping your lips, I have ways of dealing with that too.”

“Oh, you’re gonna enforce a gag order on me with a Command Spell? You know, there’s a much easier way to do that without wasting one of your precious spells. If you were a sexy lady, a kiss would do just fine-”

“Enough chitchat. What do you want?”

The police chief had completely regained his imperious composure.

“I told you, bro. Treat me to some good eats. That’ll be enough to seal my lips.

You can bet your ass I won’t be fighting on the front lines. Instead, I’ll be writing this farce into one hell of a novel. Until you snuff it, at least.”

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Night — Snowfield central intersection

Seventh Street contained an assortment of Snowfield's essential features, such as the Crystal Hill hotel casino and City Hall. On a corner of the expansive intersection stood a woman who drew the gazes of passersby.

She was a woman of twenty years, give or take, and was marked by flowing white hair, fair skin, and blazing red irises.

The woman certainly attracted the attention of the general public, but this was the Holy Grail War, and many magi had gathered in Snowfield. Their attention was drawn to her for different reasons altogether.

One magus watching from afar whispered to his comrade.

"Look. That's... a homunculus, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Such refinement can only mean it's one of the Einzbern models."

"I knew they'd come. The Einzberns wouldn't take the theft of the Holy Grail system lying down."

"But... she sure is exposed. Is it some kind of decoy?"

The quiet conversation was tinged with caution and doubt, yet similar words could be heard all over town. Did she know she was being intensely watched?

The white woman quietly turned her gaze to the heavens, and glared at the world that surrounded her. Those crimson eyes seethed with bottomless rage, as if to deny the entire world.

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Somewhere

One person in particular was spying on the woman from afar.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

When she saw the vision of the white woman in her crystal ball, the observer's face lit up with joy.

"Aha! She's here! She's here! Our last honored guest has finally arrived... hup!"

In some dark space, the young girl clad in a gothic lolita outfit — Francesca — twirled her parasol while giggling in ecstasy.

"I wonder what pawns she brought with her. I can't help but look forward to them! It would have been funny if she swallowed her pride and brought a Tohsaka descendant with her, but I guess that's a long shot."

The girl nonchalantly shook her head at her own words, continuing to pace around the dark room.

"Anyway, it's all starting! It's finally time to flip this joint upside down! I gotta do my best!"

A moment later, the crystal ball radiated light, and projected numerous images all over the walls and ceiling.

It showed the King of Heroes walking alongside Tiné, and Lancer and the wolf in the forest. There was even an image of Francesca's supposed ally, the police chief, in his office. Countless images flashed into existence and disappeared into others.

Francesca's gaze passed over each of the Heroic Spirits in the images, and then turned to an image without anyone in it. It appeared to be an opera house somewhere, though no production was playing. It merely showed an empty stage and rows of seats.

For a brief instant, the figure of a person appeared in the empty space—

Francesca peered once more at all of the displayed Heroic Spirits, and then murmured sweetly to herself. It was a whisper filled with love for the world itself.

"Now... it's time to drive out all of the fakes."

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On that day, on the edge of an instant — Snowfield's destiny became ephemeral.

The Holy Grail.

The genuine article would have required the souls of seven Heroic Spirits, yet a partially powered, imitation Grail had been prepared with only six pieces assembled.

There was no doubt that those masterminding such a grand scheme were aware of this.

The false Holy Grail War was likely a preliminary arrangement, and the system was the rock upon which the true Holy Grail War ritual would be conducted. Alternatively, there was a chance that the real event would be held elsewhere, and Snowfield was merely a red herring to distract the Association and the Church.

Many among the Magic Association thought this way.

Of course, it was also possible that the real Grail would properly summon seven Servants, and this situation with six Servants was Faldeus' bluff, but what would even be the point of such a feint?

While so many magi were puzzled, the masterminds silently progressed their plans.

The true Holy Grail War would be called forth, using the false war as a sacrifice.

All preparations were in place. The only task left was to pull the trigger that would turn the entire system on its head.

In other words, the final Servant of the false Holy Grail War would serve as the first Heroic Spirit of the true war; the calling forth of Saber would set all into motion.

Nothing other than the summoning the Heroic Spirit, possessing qualities both spurious and genuine, would serve as the mediator between the two wars.

Certainly, everything was moving according to plan. The trigger had been pulled beautifully.

That is, until the Heroic Spirit Saber was summoned.

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The First Day — Night — Snowfield — Opera House

A short distance from the center of town, there stood an opera house that was built around the time Snowfield was founded. It was a building with easily over 50 years of history, and its evident age was accompanied by a solemn air.

Currently, no shows or plays were scheduled. In fact, any new production had been delayed for at least a week in light of “limited renovations in progress.”

The hall was normally shrouded in silence, but tonight was slightly different. On the dilapidated wooden stage, something dramatic was underway.

There was neither any audience, script, nor performance to speak of, yet one could only describe the sight as theatrical.

Was it a tragedy, or a comedy? The figures upon the stage didn’t know, either.

“I ask of thee, art thou my Master?”

The voice was youthful, yet robed in gravitas.

A mysterious man stood on the stage, his blond hair tinged red here and there, his manner of dress immediately declaring him to be European aristocracy or royalty. He seemed to be in his late teens or early twenties. The man had a handsome profile, while his eyes gleamed with a

bestial air. Just the sight of him evoked feelings of being devoured whole.

The sword he gripped in one hand radiated the vestiges of a magical brilliance.

Yes, vestiges, meaning—

The faint glow of the sword was the trace of it having been swung, just moments prior.

It was an attack far short of the Heroic Spirit's full strength.

Nonetheless, it indeed left its mark on the opera house.

The audience seats on the ground level were wildly pulverized. The mezzanine and upper levels had been completely destroyed, and even some of the ceiling had been blasted open, allowing the starry night to peek through. Simply put, the Heroic Spirit had destroyed half of the opera house, which had been the pride of the entire state.

The man looked back and forth from the corpse tumbling from the stage, to the woman with glasses who had fallen on her hindquarters. Then, he spoke in an attempt to calm her down.

"Be at ease. I don't sense any civilians caught in the blast. Rather, the bandits even fled... Hmph. They did well to get away from me. It is too late to give chase, however."

The woman heard his calming words, but the only word resounding in her mind was the one he had spoken earlier.

"Excalibur"

"Sword of _____ Victory."

Fate/Strange Fake 1

He had shouted this as he attacked, and obliterated half of the huge building.

The woman grasped her situation again, as she racked her brain. Why had she come to this place?

“Now that the pest has been crushed, allow me to repeat myself.”

Again, the man spoke to the dumbfounded woman, who was cursing her entire existence. He asked the same question again, in a slightly more familiar tone.

“Shall I call you my Master? As you can see, I’m of the Saber class. If you accept, let us quickly form a contract and get this over-”

“No.”



Fate/Strange Fake 1

An instant reply.

“Absolutely not.”

“What?”

His eyes went wide, as the woman slowly stood up.

The wail of sirens gradually approached from afar. It was the sound of ambulances and police cars. Having seen the destruction of the opera house, the locals were probably in a panic.

An uncanny light emanated from the symbols on woman’s wrists, peeking out of her shirt sleeves. It seemed to be resonating with the man standing before her. Still, the woman paid no mind to the glow of her symbols and the clamor of approaching sirens and shouts. She just glared furiously at the man.

“I won’t let you lot get your way any longer.”

Then, forcing her trembling voice down her throat, she spoke clearly.

“Stay out of my way.”

It was the first meeting between a woman with dyed hair and glasses — Ayaka Sajou — and the mysterious, knightly swordsman.

It happened in a half-destroyed building.

Each confirmed the existence of the other, during the worst of times, next to an unknown corpse.

From that moment, the curtain rose on a Holy Grail War, false yet true.

In the end, was this Saber fake, or real?

Nobody knew.

Not the scheming masterminds, and not the involved magi.

Nor the Servants of incomparable power, beginning with the King of Heroes.

In other words, none could form a conclusion, not even the will of the Holy Grail that had manifested the Heroic Spirit there.

Why had Ayaka, a mere visitor to Snowfield, encountered the Heroic Spirit who called himself Saber?

It may have been a quirk of fate, formed not today or yesterday, but rather years in the making.

To answer this question, we must first speak of a ghost story in the city Fuyuki, Japan. It was known as “The Little Red Riding Hood of Semina Apartments,” and was well on its way to becoming one of Fuyuki’s urban legends.

You see, in this tale, she———

next episode: [Fake02]

CLASS

Archer

Master *Tiné Chelc*

True Name *Gilgamesh*

Gender *Male*

Height *182cm*
Weight *68kg*

Alignment *Chaotic Good*

STR  **B**

MGI  **A**

END  **B**

LCK  **A**

AGI  **B**

NP  **EX**

Personal Skills

Golden Rule: A

Money problems are completely unknown.

Divinity: B (A+)

A skill representing the depth of one's Divine Spirit aptitude, how close one is to a god.
Suitable for the highest rank, but since he loathes the gods it's reduced by a rank.

CLASS SKILLS

Magic Resistance: C Independent Action: A

Noble Phantasm

Enuma Elish

Star of Genesis Separating Heaven and Earth

Rank : EX Type : Anti-World Range: 1~99 Maximum target: 1000 person
Using Ea, the Sword of Rupture, to cut the space. It is a power used by the gods when they separated heaven and earth. In terms of power it is possible to say it is an attack close to the very top of all Noble Phantasms. By receiving the support of Noble Phantasms in his treasury, damage is further increased.

Gate of Babylon King's Treasures

Rank : E~A++ Type : Anti-Unit Range: -
The Golden Capital that is the King's Treasures, in addition of the golden key connected to it. The treasury stores rare items such as many Noble Phantasm prototypes or the models of humanity's inventions from all times and places. They can be freely taken out. Naturally whether or not they can be handled depends on the user.

CLASS

Lancer

Master *Chimera Wolf*

True Name *Enkidu*

Gender *None*

Height Weighth *Adjustable*

Alignment *True Neutral*

STR 

MGI 

END 

LCK 

AGI 

NP  A++

Personal Skills

Transfiguration: A

Stats are situationally distributed based on a fixed pool of creation points. A special skill granted due to being an automatic doll. High rank equals high amount of creation points
From A to A+ the cost rises. That is, 2 ranks worth of points is necessary.

Presence Detection: A+

Highest rank of Presence Detection ability. Capable of sensing the presence of things at long range via the Earth. At close range, an equal or lower rank of the skill
Presence Concealment can be nullified.

CLASS SKILLS

Magic Resistance: - (Because of the skill "Transfiguration," the MGI parameter fluctuates accordingly.)

Noble Phantasm

Enuma Elish

O Humanity, Bind Thy Gods

Rank : A++ Type : Anti-Purge Range: 0~999 Maximum target: 1000 people

An ability of Enkidu's to transform its own body into a Divine Construct.

The Counter Forces known as Alaya and Gaia's powers flow into a keystone made of light. Then enormous amounts of energy are transformed into a form that the world can recognize and pierces the opponent in one hit. In response to things that threaten the destruction of the planet or humanity the power is increased.

Afterword

So, hi. Narita here.

This work is not an original creation of mine; it's a spinoff novel based on the Fate works created by Nasu Kinoko-san and everyone at TYPE-MOON. I'll leave out the particulars of how I came to write this spinoff, but it started as the prologue to a nonexistent game called Fake written for April Fool's. At the time, the story ended with the protagonist — the “player character” — arriving in the city once Lancer's prologue was over, to be continued in the game itself. I have now been given the — nerve-racking — opportunity to continue it as a novel.

The Fate series was created by TYPE-MOON, lead by Nasu Kinoko-san and Takeuchi Takashi-san. This work, Strange Fake, was sparked by the tremendous energy of its setting. I could try to explain what makes the original work's “Holy Grail War” system so engaging, but I wouldn't do it justice. Instead, I recommend you try the original Fate — currently available to rave reviews on the PS2, PS Vita, and smart phones — and then Hollow Ataraxia — just released on the PS Vita — for yourselves. Also the works by other authors — Zero, Apocrypha, Prototype, Himuro no tenchi, The Lord El-Melloi II Case Files — the Extra series of games, and the comic spinoff Prisma Illya, as well as the various animated versions... Sorry. I'll stop.

Anyway, as one tributary of this great stream, I'll be happy if readers unfamiliar with Fate gain an interest in the original, while Fate fans think, “What is this idiot doing with the setting?” and read with popcorn in one hand, like they're watching a B-grade shark movie! I'll do my best to make sure that both types of readers have a good time!

Dear TYPE-MOON fans,

Concerning the character who appears at the end of the book, she's not the same person as the one in Fate/Prototype. They're from different universes, for a start. In answer to the question, “Well, what about the one in Himuro no Tenchi, then?” all I have to say is: “...I can't categorically deny any connection.” Confusing you by making you wonder, “The one from Himuro no Tenchi can't have gone bad, can she?” or, “Did she come from another universe?” was always an option, but a different spinoff already took that route, so I abstained. Instead, I'd like to leave you asking, “Well, what is she, then?” I look forward to unraveling that mystery in subsequent volumes.

I suspect many Fate fans are wondering, “This is set after the original Fate, but which route's future is it?” I hate to say this, but, “It's a fake, so it follows a mystery route.” I'll leave the rest to your imaginations. In the extra chapter, the two “Observers” leaf through a lot of pages.

You can assume that the “world’s route” changes with each of those pages.

Nasu-san has already written quite a bit about Gil and Enkidu in CCC. I’ve done my best to tell this story from a slightly different “starting point,” so that even people who have already had their fill of the pair can enjoy it. (The biggest difference is already in this first volume.)

It really does feel, as Nasu-san writes in his commentary, like I “was supposed to follow the rails, but went airborne while no one was looking.” Still, I trust that Nasu-san himself will write the “Dismantling War” that those rails — the proper future of the original Fate — lead to within the next few decades, so I’ll keep flying and do my best to put on a spectacle in the skies! ...Although it’s also possible that I’ll fall to my death a few seconds later.

Or so I say, but Nasu-san still keeps a watchful editorial eye on the world of Fate.

Nasu: “I once said that all of El-Melloi’s disciples achieved the rank of Grand, didn’t I? That was a lie.”

Narita: “Gyaaaaaaah (Read: Character Materials)!”

Nasu: “Come, Narita! Throw away the old setting and come at me!”

Narita: “Setting inconsistencies don’t scare me! I’ll crush you!”

...That aside, Nasu-san explained the latest setting details about the Mages’ Association and the Holy Church and provided me with editorial oversight on the evolving world of Fate. He gave particular attention to points like the words used by a certain great master of sorcery in the extra chapter!

Now, the Saber who appears at the end of this book is not the same person as the male Saber from Prototype. As for who he is and where he comes from, there are already several hints in this book. Try to guess while you wait for the next volume.

My editor, Anan-san and my Dura editor, Wada-san, who I caused more trouble for than usual because Durarara!! SH and this book went on sale at the same time; all the concerned parties who I am indebted to through their Fate spinoffs, beginning with Urobuchi Gen-san, Higashide Yūichirō-san, Sakurai Hikaru-san, Mashin Eiichirō-san, and Sanda Makoto-san; Team Barrel Roll, who did part of the Servant background research for me; Morii Shizuki-san, who has produced wonderful illustrations for this book in addition to drawing the nearly-simultaneous comic version of Fate/Strange Fake; and, most importantly, Nasu Kinoko-san, who created Fate and wrote a wonderful commentary for this volume; everyone at TYPE-MOON... and all the readers who picked up this book and made it this far:

Thank you very much!

Now then, I suspect it will be a long haul, but I would appreciate it if you would bear with me as a palate cleanser between other TYPE-MOON works.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

November 2014, while wondering if the Koha Ace Heroic Spirits are canon.

Narita Ryōgo

Commentary

Nasu Kinoko

Let's talk about fakes fighting originals. Whether they're bootlegs or epigones, once their value starts to differ from that of their originals, questions of real and fake disappear. The same goes for pseudepigrapha. If the creator's beliefs are contained in the stories they tell, then that is someone's truth and not a mistake.



Etcetera. I thought I'd expound on taboos by way of a preface, knowing full well that plunging into these topics in this industry just reeks of danger.

Pleased to meet you, Dengeki Bunko readers. This is Nasu Kinoko, writer of Fate/Stay Night.

First of all, congratulations on Fate/Strange Fake beginning publication.

95 percent of this story is Narita Ryōgo's creation, but about five percent is in the story that forms its basic setting — a novel-game called Fate/Stay Night. Fate/Stay Night is a long game with three routes in a single world. One of those routes, "Unlimited Blade Works," takes up the theme of "real and fake." 14 years later, in 2015, this book, Fate/Strange Fake, by Narita Ryōgo tackles that theme head on.

To be precise, it actually began on April 1st, 2008. On April Fool's, the annual day of brinkmanship between creators — I mean horseplay — when Narita Ryōgo casually published "a Holy Grail War [he] thought up" on his homepage.

The density of material in that short work, called "Fake," as well as its intriguing choice of setting and the impossibility of predicting where its plot was going to go, led to continuous cries that it was "too good to end as a joke." Now, Takeuchi Takashi, representing TY-PE-MOON, has made Narita Ryōgo an official offer. He casually invited Mr. Narita onto our home turf with something like:

"I have something to discuss about 'Fake.' Would you mind coming in to our office?"

We were sizing up how to explain the situation, when Narita Ryōgo, with stars in his eyes, unleashed the following counter:

"I was ready to get raked over the coals for doing it without permission, but I get to write a sequel? Yes! ...By the way, I've got enough plot for five books. That's not a problem, is it?"

I seem to recall the author of Zero countering in a similar fashion, but that's a story for

Fate/Strange Fake 1

another time.

With a sidelong glance at the speechless Takeuchi Takashi, Mr. Narita unveiled the sprawling (“The short version was sprawling enough? But that was just the introduction. Ha ha ha.”) overall plot. As an author who loves ensemble pieces, he was in his element. His level of commitment convinced us that a simple project wouldn’t suffice, so we rolled up our sleeves and officially reached out to Dengeki Bunko for cooperation — which they willingly agreed to. Before we knew it, the project was underway. We ultimately ended up sending this series into the world as a simultaneous publication with its comic version.

That brings us to the present. Just now.

This volume is a prologue, the first bars of the real thrill of the Holy Grail War that its author, Narita Ryōgo, has been saving up for years. The fact that a prologue can be this engaging genuinely frightens me. So far, most of it is just a “ghost story” that’s been whispered about for the past six years, and which will already be familiar to many readers. What comes next, however, is unknown. This is where the true Fake Holy Grail War begins.

How will the Narita Holy Grail War that got its start on April 1st play out? As a reader myself, I can hardly contain my excitement. I can also hardly contain my nervousness, because, really, Narita... do you honestly believe that plot will take just five volumes?



The basic rules of Fate/Stay Night are simple. There’s a Grail that can grant wishes; there are seven mages (Masters) who have gathered to obtain it; and to represent them in battle, there are Heroic Spirits from the past — Servants. Up to seven Servants can be summoned in a single Holy Grail War. Servants are divided into classes and assigned to Master’s by the Holy Grail. Saber, Lancer, Archer, Rider, Caster, Assassin, Berserker. Servants fight and kill each other while concealing their own identities until only one pair remains.

If thou desire the truth — if thou desire the Grail — prove thyself the mightiest.

As the tagline for the first release of Fate/Stay Night says, it’s the start of a merry battle royal. Ten years have gone by since the original story, and it’s made fertile soil. Anything that follows these rules can be called Fate, and Fate has had the good fortune to receive new life in the hands of numerous authors.

To date, we have had Fate/Zero, Fate/Apocrypha, Fate/Prototype, and others. Fake, however, differs conceptually from all of these. It’s right there in the title. Fake is a future that

should have been impossible given form; a parallel world for Narita Ryōgo to go wild with TYPE-MOON's fantastic setting.

Take Enkidu and Gil's relationship. The end they came to in myth is the same in both Stay Night and Fake, but the process is subtly different.

If I were to force myself to categorize each work, Zero is a world with the same terms as Stay Night, but which is subtly different; Apocrypha is a world that was the same up to a point, but which is now completely different; The El-Melloi Case Files is a dense story of magecraft in exactly the same world, but with a slightly different atmospheric density due to Sanda Mako-to spice; and Strange Fake is a world that is somehow completely different despite having the same terms and reaching the same conclusion. As for why it is that way, half of it is that the theme of Fake is falsehood, so it's better to put the differences with Stay Night up front.

The other half is, well... I can only say that it's because Narita Ryōgo is the Narita Ryōgo we know. After all, he says things like, "I'd like to include setting details from Tsukihime and other things, not just Fate. I want to play in Nasu Kinoko's garden. Actually, I want to become a Zen priest and depict the universe in the garden of Kinoko Temple. In fact, I want to merge with you. No, I already have. Anyway, I want to use absolutely everything in this world, so I'd like you to show me setting details for the Association and the Church and that sort of thing to start. If they're company secrets, I'll just dream them up on my own. I'd like you to give me a sign if I get it wrong."

And, annoyingly, he's incredibly good at using a preexisting setting like that. I knew that from his other novelizations, but I never imagined that I'd be on the receiving end of it. I see... So, this is Narita Ryōgo...

So, Fake doesn't follow the rails that Stay Night laid down. Instead, it became a parallel "fake" that uses those rails to get airborne. I hope that users familiar with TYPE-MOON will enjoy a modest resemblance over strict conformity. Making Gil and Enkidu, Jeanne and _____ match previous works exactly would detract from the greatness of Fake and Narita Ryōgo. That would be a tragedy. It would also defeat the purpose of publishing it as a "fake."

This is a story created from a different story, using the same materials and creative principles. For that reason, I would like everyone to look forward to an unknown Holy Grail War with fresh feelings. This story will not betray your expectations. This first volume has already proven that.

Exceptions summoned one after another.

A way of choosing and using each piece that will shock and astonish you more the better you know the world of the story.

Fate/Strange Fake 1

A miraculous outside pitch thrown by the routine world of F.

This is one talented author's ultimate revenge on the original work.

"How dare you do something that cool! I'll pay you back double!"

I'm grateful for my good fortune to have encountered an author who sublimates such clichés into a work and lovingly delivers it head-on.

Strange Fake.

Will that cursed blade cleave Nasu kinoko's flesh and bone?

Now... welcome to the intrigue and trouble-filled fictional city of Snowfield.